

REFERENCE BOOK

CONDUCT

OF A

CONTACT SQUADRON,

BY

CAPTAIN R. DE BIENSAN,

3RD (FRENCH) CUIRASSIERS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,

BY

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8TH HUSSARS.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

" If the English Cavalry understood war, it would be, perhaps, on the day of battle the most terrible in Europe. Its well known costliness in horses and equipments is in harmony with the courage and smartness of its soldiers. When it appears you are sure that its action is combined, its attack will be powerful, and its retreat regular. It is rarely separated from the Infantry, which ensures its repose in bivouacs. It learns the positions and judges the intentions of the enemy more through spies, which it pays handsomely, than through its reconnaissances."

So wrote de Brack fifty years ago, and although considerable progress has since then been made in the knowledge of the mere form of reconnaissance, it will probably be granted that we do not spend enough time in the practice of it, nor carry it out on a sufficiently large scale. Not only have we nothing whatever corresponding to the "Übungs-Reisen" of the Austrians and Germans, but our very rare autumn manoeuvres give us no opportunity of practising cavalry reconnaissance properly so called, and much more attention is generally paid to marching-past and field-movements than to reconnoitring duties. Moreover, we have no books from which our officers and non-commissioned officers can learn even the theory of this which is now the most important branch of cavalry service. As the result of all these disadvantages, it is to be feared that we are not as proficient in the work as we might be.

It is not unusual to hear the remark that pluck, good riding, and common sense are after all the main requisites for the cavalry reconnoittrer, that no precise rules can be laid down for all the combinations which are likely to occur in actual warfare, and that we had much better trust to officers and men to improvise the best thing to be done according to place and circumstances. Absolutely necessary as the above qualifications no doubt are, it is possible that they might be found to fail should the possessors of them be pitted against cavalry which, in addition to these qualities, possessed also those of thorough training in the theory of the duty and thorough proficiency in the practice of it.

As General Brialmont remarks, "A good general does not, like the poet and artist, wait for a happy inspiration when the moment for action arrives. He knows beforehand what he will do in such and such a case, because he has *learnt* it;" and this applies equally to the cavalry reconnoittrer.

But how are we to *learn* what to do? As a first step, it may perhaps be well to consider what we *have* to do; and nowhere shall we find this more clearly put than in the little work which, through the generosity of its author and publisher, we are now permitted to lay before the English reader. Written as they were for the use of the French Cavalry, the following pages contain much that may at first sight appear unsuited to our squadrons, as at present constituted; but the translator has endeavoured to adapt them as far as possible to the requirements of the British Cavalry. With this view he has not hesitated to add such notes as seemed requisite, either for the purpose of explaining the text or in order to draw particular attention to important principles suggested by it.

The distances have been reduced to English yards, and in order to avoid odd-looking figures the yards have usually been given in round numbers, generally the nearest 10; thus, 1000 metres are shewn as 1100 yards instead of 1093.63 &c. A comparative scale of yards having been added to the plates immediately under the French scale, the reader is recommended to make the comparison for himself, whenever a distance is named; the ability which will thus be acquired of realising distances in metres and kilometres may afterwards be found of great value in studying foreign military works and maps.

As to the mechanical part of the work, the mere translation, the main object has been to render it as literal as possible, and the translator wishes to acknowledge his obligation to his friend Major C. G. Edwards, 2nd West York Yeomanry Cavalry, for many valuable suggestions in this respect.

*Staff College,  
July, 1883.*

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

The present work has no claim to novelty. It is evident that its spirit, method and form are borrowed from the works of General Verdy du Vernois. But do not let the reader accuse me of having attempted to make a réchauffé of his work ; a master piece does not admit of being hashed up again, neither may it be counterfeited ; moreover, the reader may rest assured that my aim has been far less ambitious.

The Prussian general exhorts his officers to practise his method ; and it seems to me that his advice, though not intended for us, is none the less worth following. But though the general might well be justified in tackling problems on a grand scale, a becoming modesty compelled me to aim at a much lower mark. On this account I have attempted to work out for a squadron what he has done for a division, thus bringing the tactical horizon within the limits of a less extended range of vision.

It is unnecessary to say that the proposed solutions of the various problems are not proof against criticism. On the contrary, my attempt will have attained its end, and I shall consider myself only too happy to have made it, if it be fortunate enough to provoke discussion, and if a comparison of the opinions then expressed should induce competent authorities to establish certain points which are yet undecided.

Lastly, if it should be asked why I have borrowed both theme and actors from the military history of our neighbours, and have purposely altered dates and details, I would adduce two reasons ; the first, that I was anxious to have a groundwork of reality so as to give animation to the story ; the second, that I feared lest a selection from French records might give to my opinions the semblance of a criticism. We have already had so many criticisms, that I did not wish to expose myself to the reproach of adding to their number and unseasonableness.

With these provisos, it is allowable to call to mind that the German scouts were already over the Moselle, on the flanks of the unfortunate army of the Rhine, while our squadrons were trudging along at the heels of the infantry. For the honour of our arms there is more than a revenge to be taken for this, there is an insult to be wiped out.

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CONDUCT  
OF A  
**CONTACT SQUADRON.**  
**GENERAL IDEA.\***

Three armies of the east have defeated the forces of the west which were opposed to them in the Vosges and on the Sarre. The latter, disorganised by a double repulse, have been broken up into two masses. The first, thrown back under the walls of Metz, is there completely invested; the second, having escaped the pursuit of the enemy, retires precipitately towards the plains of Champagne.

On the 1st July the general situation of the eastern armies is as follows :

The 1st Army is investing the corps which have sought shelter at Metz.

The 2nd Army has taken position on the Meuse, north and south of Verdun, and observes the routes of Champagne.

The 3rd Army, continuing the pursuit, follows the traces of the enemy towards Paris. Its cavalry divisions have reached the Ornain, the main body of the army having reached but not crossed the Meuse.

The 1st Cavalry Division has just recovered traces of the enemy, which had been lost for some days.

The General commanding this division arrives at Maulon with the Cuirassier brigade.

The Hussar brigade is at Nant-le-Grand and Montplonne.

The Dragoon brigade is at Nant-le-Petit and Ménil-sur-Saulx.

The 1st Dragoons, which occupies the latter point, has already pushed its 1st Squadron beyond Stainville.

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\*See General Map. In order to derive the fullest advantage from the study of this work, the reader is strongly recommended to have the map before him whenever he reads the text; and on any place being named, its position should at once be noted and the distance estimated. This will furnish a good exercise in calculating the time required for the movements of patrols, &c., and will gradually impress upon the mind the relation between metres and yards.—Tr.

## 1ST JULY.

## I.

**Special Mission of the 1st Squadron.\***

At 4 p.m. on the 1st July, when our narrative commences, the captain of the 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons, fell back on Stainville, and wrote to his colonel :

Stainville, 1st July, 4 p.m.

*To the Colonel of the 1st Dragoons, at Ménil-sur-Saulx.*

Compelled to evacuate Ancerville, I have reached Stainville, followed by a battalion of the enemy. I remain here protected by march-outposts.† The enemy's battalion occupies Aulnois, and a body of his cavalry has seized Lavincourt. I think there must be a rather strong force of infantry at Ancerville. I await orders.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron.*

At 5 o'clock, the captain received in reply a double despatch.

(FIRST DESPATCH.)

1st Dragoons.

No. 500.

Ménil-sur-Saulx, 1st July, 4.35 p.m.

*To the Captain, 1st Squadron, at Stainville.*

You ought to have informed me as to the strength of the enemy's cavalry at Lavincourt. Hold on to Stainville and the road to Saint-Dizier. At the same time reconnoitre Lavincourt, ascertain enemy's strength, and, if he is not too strong, drive him out; otherwise, let me know. I send the 2nd Squadron to Stainville to support you if necessary; send it back to me if you do not require it. Some prisoners would be useful to us. Report to me.

M...

*Colonel, 1st Dragoons.*

The mild reprimand contained in this despatch was deserved. A cavalry officer ought never to report that he has seen the enemy,

\*See Map I.

When a body of troops halts for a considerable time within reach of an enemy, the latter will have ample opportunity for ascertaining its presence and the best lines for reconnaissances and attacks; the outpost veil must therefore be so continuous that it cannot be penetrated at any point without detection. On the other hand, if a marching body halts for a short time only, (e.g., for the night, at the close of a hard day; or for refreshment, during the day), it will usually be neither possible nor necessary to establish so completely continuous a line of observation, and it will then generally suffice to occupy (by Cossack-posts or vedettes) some commanding points by day, and both by day and by night the routes by which the enemy would be likely to advance under ordinary circumstances. This modification of outposts is termed "March-outposts" (*avant-postes de marche*), and will usually be the only means of security which a small body could afford to adopt at any time. [See "Tactique de l'Érizonius," 6th Ed., trans. by Raffin, p. 291.] —Tr.

without mentioning his strength, unless he adds that it was impossible to ascertain it. On the other hand, the colonel's orders are no less exceptionable.

In the first place, the expression "*if he is not too strong*" is vague, and leaves too much margin for a timid or rash interpretation.

Secondly, when stating that the 2nd Squadron was proceeding to support the 1st, the colonel ought to have indicated which of the captains was to be under the orders of the other, or at any rate, whether they were to arrange between them how the operation should be conducted. Moreover, the 2nd Squadron, whether through error or otherwise, did not turn up at all.

Too much care cannot be taken in wording orders correctly and precisely. The slightest neglect in this respect often causes misunderstandings which are much to be regretted.

(SECOND DESPATCH.)

1st Dragoons.

No. 499.

Ménil-sur-Saulx, 1st July, 4 p.m.

*To the Captain, 1st Squadron, at Stainville.*

ORDER.

Orders having been received from the Division to detail a Squadron of the 1st Dragoons to perform the duty defined in the instructions herewith sent, the 1st Squadron is selected for the purpose. Captain A..., on receipt hereof, will therefore comply with those instructions.

The sum of 3000 francs is also sent herewith, being an advance for the use of the squadron. The captain will account for this money in accordance with the instructions of the General Commanding the Division.

On the 1st Squadron leaving Stainville the captain will immediately make a report thereof to the Colonel.

All dismounted men and impedimenta to be sent to me.

M...

*Colonel, 1st Dragoons.*

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1st Divison of Cavalry.

Staff,

No. 155.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CONTACT SQUADRON.

1°—To-morrow and following days the Division will continue its march towards Châlons, by the right bank of the Marne, while the 2nd Cavalry Division will march level with it on the left bank.

The General and the main body of the division will follow the route Saint-Dizier, Vitry-le-François, Châlons, with detachments more or less considerable to the north of this route.

The Dragoon Brigade ought to pass to-morrow night, 2nd July, at Ancerville, and the divisional head-quarters should be at Stainville or Aulnois-en-Barrois.

2°—According to latest accounts, the enemy, defeated in the Vosges, must have retired towards Châlons by road and rail. But it is not known whether he intends to take up a position in that neighbourhood, or merely proposes to halt there so as to rest and take the field again.

It is probable that the detachment reported to-day by the Dragoon Brigade on the Saint-Dizier road is only a weak rear-guard or a fraction of the retreating army which has been delayed on the march.

3°—A squadron of the Dragoon Brigade is specially detailed to discover what is going on in the direction of Châlons, and to search for information.

To this end, it will first of all fasten on to the detachment of the enemy sighted on the Saint-Dizier road, with the view of learning whence it comes, whither it is going, and to what arm and sub-division of that arm it belongs.

On the way it will as soon as possible reach the station of Blesme (junction of the Verdun and Langres Railways), and will there effect such partial destructions as may be necessary to stop the railway traffic and the transmission of telegraphic despatches.

Finally, it will strive above everything to find out whether the enemy is or is not in force in the direction of Châlons, and the direction he may have taken.

All papers calculated to give any military information will be seized and transmitted to the General of Division; and the squadron will render good service if it can, without compromising itself, send in some prisoners.

4°—The squadron, when once it has gained contact with any important body of the enemy, must follow it up closely and not again lose sight of it.

5°—Reports will be sent of every occurrence and of all information gained, and, in any case, a report will be made every night describing the projects for the next day.

6°—Despatches will be addressed direct to the General of Division; but the bearers should deliver them to the first officer commanding troops or staff-officer of the division whom they may meet. The latter have instructions to provide the necessary relays for transmitting them to their destination. In the transmission of despatches lies the chief difficulty of the duty assigned to the Contact Squadron; but the General relies upon the zeal, intelligence, and initiative of the captain to acquit himself honorably of the task imposed upon him.

7°—The squadron will be rationed by requisitions, either bonds being signed for the articles supplied, or, if necessary, ready money paid. The captain will for this purpose receive from his regiment an advance of 3,000 francs, which he will account for by producing the receipts of the payees, or, when it can be clearly shown that these could not be obtained, declarations of payment signed by the captain and two officers.

8°—The mission of the squadron, depending as it does entirely on the initiative of the captain, cannot be more precisely defined. The captain must bear in mind that it is for him to decide on the steps to be taken, that his acts will always be approved of provided they lead to a useful result, and that according to the amount and importance of the information he transmits will he be considered to have acquitted himself well.

(Signed) X...

*General of Division.*

True copy :

M...

*Colonel, 1st Dragoons.*

Captain A... had reason to suppose that the enemy could not be in force at Lavincourt; but having resolved to assure himself on this point with as little delay as possible, and as he saw no signs of support from the 2nd Squadron as announced by his colonel, he immediately gave orders as follows :

#### VERBAL ORDER.

Stainville, 5 p.m.

*To Lieutenant B...*

Take your two pelotons\* and march to Lavincourt. Reconnoitre the enemy and, if he is not stronger than you are, drive him out of the village. Endeavour to take some prisoners. At Lavincourt you will leave the peloton of Sub-Lieut. C..., who will establish himself there as a detached post, watching the valley of the Saulx

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\*The French Squadron is divided into 4 pelotons.—Tr.

and woods, and constantly patrolling; his party will subsist on requisitions. After you have driven the enemy away, you will rejoin me here with your peloton. If you find the enemy stronger than you, do not attack him but let me know. If he threatens to re-occupy Lavincourt after having evacuated it, remain there with your two pelotons, and report to me.

**5 p.m.**—At 5 o'clock Lieut. B... set out for Lavincourt with his two pelotons. The captain then demanded supplies from the mayor of Stainville. In view of a possible alarm, he directed that the provisions should be collected on the right bank of the Saulx, close to the bridge, and he requisitioned two carriages to convey them wherever they might be wanted.

The march-outposts (*halte gardée*) at Stainville were thus arranged: a Cossack-post\* of 4 men at point 272 on the Ancerville road (see Map I.), one to the south half-way to the farm of Jovilliers, and a third to the north-east on the high ground commanding Lavincourt. The remainder of the squadron, that is, the 3rd and 4th pelotons, dismounted on the road at the edge of the plateau which commands Stainville on the west.

At 5 p.m. a dragoon from the post at point 272 comes in to report that "the enemy's sentries are posted on the west side of the ravine which crosses the road, and further in rear on the road, between 'the woods of Stainville and Saulx, a halted body of infantry is to be seen: this body appears to be about 200 strong."

The captain hastens to forward this information.

Stainville, 1st July, 5.15 p.m.

*To the Colonel, 1st Dragoons, at Ménil-sur-Saulx.*

The enemy's sentries (infantry) can be seen on the road to Saint-Dizier at 1,100 yards from my posts, and beyond them a company. This looks very much like outposts. I conclude that it belongs to the battalion at Aulnois. Under these circumstances I do not consider myself safe at night on the left bank of the Saulx. I shall therefore bivouac on the right bank, leaving a peloton at the entrance to the village near the bridge, which will be barricaded. I am requisitioning forage and rations at Stainville.

Lieut. B... has been sent to Lavincourt to drive out the enemy.

I have duly received your despatch No. 499, which instructs me to hang on to the enemy. The orders therein contained shall be carried out.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron.*

## II.

### Affair of Lavincourt.

Lieut. B... marched off at 5 p.m. to dislodge the enemy from Lavincourt. He had formed his party in column of pelotons, and was covered by a small advanced guard and two flanking patrols.

\*Cossack-posts are a kind of Detached N.C.O.'s Post, or Standing Patrol, consisting generally of a single vedette (who alone remains mounted), two men (his reliefs) and a N.C.O. or old soldier; or they may be strengthened by some men for patrolling. The dismounted party may be close to or a short distance from the mounted man, but must always be ready to mount and patrol in any suspected direction. They may partially or even entirely replace Double Vedettes, to which Von Schmidt preferred them. (See his "Instructions," Off. Trans. pp. 175 and 215). For complete account of Cossack system, see Pierron's "Méthodes de Guerre," Tome III., p. 164. Posts of three men, without a N.C.O., are now being advocated in Germany under the name of "Triple Vedettes."—Tr.

After 10 minutes march, he reached a small ravine which debouches in the valley of the Saulx, and thence perceived a mounted patrol of three men on the road from Lavincourt to Stainville.

This patrol then fell back on the village at a gallop. Looking at the conformation of the ground, Lieut. B... determined to gain the hollow ground which extends from the wood of Stainville to Lavincourt, so as to reach the village under cover and at the same time menace the enemy's communications.

Just as he disappeared in the hollow he perceived a peloton debouching from the village and moving to the south-east, following the edge of the plateau. But knowing that Stainville is held by the rest of the squadron, he does not fear his right being turned, and taking no notice of this threatening movement proceeds to carry out his plan. As it happens, however, the hostile peloton soon turns back and retires precipitately towards the village. Lieut. B... pushes on his advanced guard at full trot, and himself follows at some 450 yards distance. The advanced guard is received by a few harmless carbine shots, but chasing before it four hussars who escape along the Saulx, it reaches the first houses of the village, and seeing no further signs of the enemy, signals to the main body that the road is clear. Lieut. B..., who had momentarily halted, then passes through the abandoned village and pursues the enemy. But the latter has entered the wood of Rupt-aux-Nonnains and disappears from view. Lieut. B... forms up on the border of the wood and has the village behind him searched, in the hope of picking up a straggler; but no one is found.

Lieut. B... at once reported.

Lavincourt, 1st July, 5.35 p.m.

*To Captain A..., at Stainville.*

I am in Lavincourt. The village was occupied by a peloton of hussars who have abandoned it without fighting and have escaped to the west into the woods. No prisoners. Nothing more to be seen. I shall watch for some time and if nothing fresh occurs shall rejoin you, leaving the 2nd peloton here as a detached post.

B...

*Lieutenant.*

**6 p.m.**—The above despatch reached the captain at Stainville about 6 p.m., and a quarter of an hour afterwards the post at 272 reported that the enemy's sentries had fallen back and his infantry was retiring by the road in several columns, one of which had already passed beyond Aulnois.

Captain A... transmitted this information to the colonel, also reporting the success of Lieut. B...’s operation at Lavincourt. But now a question presented itself. The enemy’s battalion was abandoning Aulnois. Ought he to follow it up at once? The instructions said “yes.” But it was now late; the squadron had been out since morning, and neither men nor horses had eaten anything. Provisions were ready at Stainville; could they be reckoned upon anywhere else at this late hour? Strictly speaking they could have contented themselves with what they carried (*vivres du sac*), but the horses would get no forage. Again, was it really necessary to follow the enemy? For where could the enemy’s infantry go at such an hour? Admitting that they might

continue their retreat, they could hardly get beyond Ancerville, since they too had marched all day and required rest at night. By starting early the next day he would have plenty of time to overtake them.

The captain decided to adopt the latter course, and reported it in his despatch to the colonel. At the same time, in order to watch the enemy from a nearer point, he resolved to have a post in Aulnois all night.

Stainville, 1st July, 6.30 p.m.

*To Colonel M..., at Ménil-sur-Saulx.*

A peloton of Hussars has been driven from Lavincourt without fighting. My 2nd peloton occupies the place and will remain there as a detached post. No prisoners. The enemy's battalion is moving off from Aulnois towards Ancerville. Impossible to follow it to-night, as my men and horses have eaten nothing and require rest. Am going to push forward a Cossack-post into Aulnois, so as to keep the enemy in view. To-morrow at day-break I shall be at his heels. Am going to rest and pass the night at Stainville.

A...

*Captain.*

**6.35 p.m.**—At 6.35 p.m. Lieut. B... returned from Lavincourt with his peloton. He reported that he had left Sub-Lieut. C... there, that the latter was obtaining provisions by requisition, that all was quiet in the village and neighbourhood, and that the outpost service there was securely arranged.

Meanwhile, the quartermaster-serjeant (fourrier) of the squadron was taking care that the requisitioned carriage was ready, and that the victuals and forage would be collected quickly on the right bank of the Saulx.

The captain decided to canton his squadron. For this purpose the village of Stainville possessed all the necessary resources, and the cantonment was soon prepared. After that the issues of rations, &c., were made. As soon as these were completed, a serjeant was sent out with 7 men, with orders to pick up *en route* the post at 272 and establish himself at Aulnois as a detached post. He was to pass the night there, to patrol carefully in the direction of Ancerville, Haronneville, and Cousancelles, especially about day-break, and to report all the movements of the enemy in that quarter. He took with him the provisions necessary for the detachment.

Some of the men of the squadron were told off to make the soup, while the rest occupied the cantonment.

The Cossack-post on the road to Jovilliers had to be provided with soup and forage from the squadron. As a matter of fact the requisitioned cart was not necessary, and it had only been demanded to meet possible eventualities; but it was used for carrying these provisions, which spared the quartermaster-corporal a journey on horseback, as he rode on the cart to make his issue.

**7.15 p.m.**—By 7.15 p.m. the squadron was cantoned. The entrance to the village was barricaded, and its defence entrusted to a dismounted detachment which was to sleep in the nearest house. The horses were rubbed down and fed, and were watered by parties at a time at a watering-place near the Saulx bridge.

The guard was mounted at the mairie, and the captain chose the head of the bridge on the right bank of the Saulx as the alarm post.

The watch-word was sent to the post on the road to Jovilliers and to the peloton at Lavincourt. To the latter the captain at the same time sent the following order :

Stainville, 1st July, 7.30 p.m.

*To Sub-Lieut. C... at Lavincourt.*

Protect yourself on the north in the direction of the valley of the Saulx, on the south-east in the direction of the valley which leads to the Ancerville road, and on the west in the direction of the wood. Patrol frequently during the night.

Our post which was at 272, on the Ancerville road, has been strengthened and pushed on to Aulnois, where it will pass the night. The enemy has left Aulnois and retreated towards Ancerville.

To-morrow (2nd July) be with your peloton at 272 on the Ancerville road at 5 a.m. The squadron will pass there and pick you up *en route*.

A..

*Captain.*

Captain A... gave out the orders for the next day. Reveille at 4 a.m. Water, feed with a quarter of the oats left, carry the other quarter on the saddle, call in the post on the Jovilliers road, and mount. The squadron to form up at the entrance to Stainville, on the Ancerville road, at 4.45 a.m.

The reports from the detached posts arrived in the evening. They said that everything was quiet at Aulnois, Lavincourt, and the road to Jovilliers. Towards the farm of Jovilliers communication was established with the 2nd squadron. The patrols had reported nothing to be seen.

Under these circumstances, and with an eye to the fatigues they might have to endure during the following days, the captain ordered the horses to be unsaddled so as to give them all the rest possible; but the men were forbidden to sleep away from their stables, each man to be beside his arms and saddlery. They were also warned to keep some cold breakfast for the morning.\*

Having given these orders, the captain went round stables and turned in for the night.

#### Note.

For the better understanding of the narrative, the reader should note the following points :

At the time when its mission commences, as defined in Regimental Order No. 499, the 1st Squadron 1st Dragoons has in the ranks, exclusive of officers, 180 men and 180 horses, some having been incapacitated by the marches and engagements of the preceding days. But all the lame horses, and the dismounted men, had been sent to

\*On service, breakfasts should always be prepared, as far as possible, the night before, as there may be no time in the morning; indeed a cooked meal in advance is always to be striven for.—T.S.

the rear on the 30th June, so that every man and horse included in the above numbers might be considered effective. The officers were:

- A ..... *Captain Commanding.*
- B ..... *Lieutenant.*
- C ..... *Sub-lieutenant.*
- D ..... *Sub-lieutenant.*
- E ..... *Lieutenant.*

#### COMPOSITION OF THE 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION.

*General of Division, X...*

- Hussar Brigade,      |
    - 1st Hussars.
    - General Y...      |
      - 2nd Hussars.
  - Dragoon Brigade,      |
    - 1st Dragoons.
    - General Z...      |
      - 2nd Dragoons.
  - Cuirassier Brigade,    |
    - 1st Cuirassiers.
    - General W...      |
      - 2nd Cuirassiers.
  - Artillery ..... .... 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Batteries.
  - Train, telegraph, police, &c.
-

## 2ND JULY.

## I.

**March to la Houette and affair of the forest of Valtieremont.**

**5 a.m.**—On the 2nd July, at 5 a.m., the squadron left Stainville. The 4th peloton (Lieut. E...) formed the advanced guard, preceding the main body at 600 metres (650 yards) distance, and pushing its point\* 450 yards in advance. At 272 the 2nd peloton joined the squadron from Lavincourt, where nothing had occurred during the night. The squadron proceeded at a trot till within 550 yards of Aulnois, and on arriving at the village found the detached post of the 3rd peloton formed upon the road waiting for it.

While on the way, a trifling incident occurred which gave Captain A... an opportunity for imparting a little instruction. The peloton forming the advanced guard had sent some men to the right and left of the road to search the woods of Saulx and Stainville. This precaution was of course warranted by the regulations, but while waiting to know the result of the search, the commander of the peloton had halted his party, not venturing to pass between the woods until they had been reconnoitred.

The captain did not know for what reason the advanced guard had been stopped; but as he received no disquieting information, he continued to march on and soon came up to it. He then drew the attention of the advanced guard commander to the fact that a detachment of their own had occupied Aulnois since the night before; this circumstance being well known, there was therefore no occasion to halt in order to search the woods on the hither side of Aulnois.

The detachment referred to must in fact have been very careless and reprehensible if it had allowed the enemy to pass during the night without observing and reporting it. Moreover, the general situation indicated an evident retreat on the part of the enemy, and the attitude of his rear-guard the evening before, so far from presaging an offensive return, rather gave one reason to fear that he might give us the slip by making a precipitate retreat.

The captain then told the peloton commander that he was right in throwing out some men towards the woods, but that he should not

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\*The "point" of an advanced guard may be considered to correspond to our "Advanced Party," or to the "Advanced Scouts" which are pushed forward from it when it is strong enough to furnish them. If the advanced guard of a small body consists of a single group of men it is also called a point, and the term is applied generally to any small reconnoitring parties.—Tr.

have halted to wait for their return; on the other hand, the situation demanded that they should advance when on the other side of Aulnois with increased precautions.

A halt was made at Aulnois to tighten the horses' girths and adjust the saddlery, &c. The detached post in this village had already drawn in its regular vedettes, but it was formed up on the road without taking precautions for its safety, and the captain severely censured the non-commissioned officer. *It is absolutely necessary that no body, however small, should under any circumstances rest in any situation, for ever so short a time, without having the approaches to its position watched to a distance of at least 200 to 300 yards.\**

The non-commissioned officer reported that all had been quiet during the night, and that nothing had been seen of the enemy since sun-rise.

The captain then sent out two patrols, each consisting of 6 men under a non-commissioned officer, with the following instructions:—

For the first patrol :

March towards the north-east, following the left side of the little ravine you see on your right. You will meet with a road which leads to Haironville, a village about 3 miles from where we are. Do not go as far as the village, but reconnoitre the road leading to it and the border of Rupt woods on the west. If you see no signs of the enemy, rejoin me; I shall wait for you at the junction of the road we are on with that leading to Haironville. If the enemy appears, watch him and report.

For the second patrol :

Go towards the south-east, passing between the woods which you see on your left. They are the woods of la Vermillière and Robin. Push on to the Cousance stream, search the villages of Cousanelles and Cousances, which lie in the valley, and reconnoitre the passages of the stream at those places. If there are no signs of the enemy, rejoin me; I shall wait for you on the road we are now on, where it joins the road to Cousanelles, at the place called la Houpette. If you see the enemy, watch and report. Travel at a brisk trot, but let the horses breathe now and then.

The captain had dismounted, and roughly drew the route for each non-commissioned officer, on tracing paper. He calculated that both patrols would take an hour to complete their ride of 10 kilometres ( $6\frac{1}{4}$  miles). As to the squadron, marching at the walk it would be at la Houpette in half an hour.

While awaiting the return of the patrols, there would be plenty of time to search the wood of Valtièremont.

We see from this how advantageous it is that *chiefs of patrols should be able to read a sketch sufficiently well to guide themselves in unknown ground.* More extended acquaintance with topography is not indispensable for them, although always useful, but ability to read maps is absolutely necessary. Careful instruction in this should be given in peace time.

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\*The distance will depend upon circumstances; such as the length of time the halted body will require to be ready to meet an attack, the distance to which the closeness of the surrounding country enables the look-out men to see, &c.: but, in all cases, whether the body is feeding or watering, or merely resting for a few minutes, these men must be pushed far enough and in sufficient numbers to ensure the whole party being mounted in time to meet or avoid a sudden attack.—Tr.

Again, we see that an officer who detaches a patrol ought to take into consideration the time it will require to complete its round. One is always apt to be deceived in this respect. A mission that one does not direct personally always appears to be executed too slowly, and one loses all patience to no purpose. On the contrary, when acting under the orders of another, every one knows how irritating it is to feel that one is followed about by a chief who is constantly imagining, and quite wrongly, that we might move much faster. The time required should therefore be carefully calculated, and a good margin left, since allowance must be made for unforeseen accidents; by so doing we may avoid a good deal of disappointment, besides the error of addressing unmerited reproaches to subordinates.

During the halt, Lieut. E..., of the advanced guard, had had the wood of la Vermillière searched as far as its western edge. Nothing was discovered there.

After this rest of 10 minutes, the squadron continued to march towards the west. It was now 6.5 a.m.

**6.35 a.m.**—At 6.35 the squadron reached la Houpette, and again halted. The captain let Lieut. E... know that he must search the entrance into the wood of Valtièremont, and push a point as far as the opposite border of the wood towards the village of Ancerville.

The squadron formed march-outposts (*halte gardée*): 2 men at 1000 metres (1100 yards) on the Ancerville road; 2 at 1100 yards up the Haironville road; and 2 at the same distance down the road to Cousancelles: the rear-guard facing towards the east.

In this position the squadron dismounted.

Up to this point, strictly speaking, no trace of the enemy had been found. All that was known amounted to this: that the detachment of infantry, which had reached Aulnois the previous evening, had evacuated it at 6 p.m., and had retired westward along the main road. Taking into consideration the lateness of the hour and the fatigues of the day (for it had pursued our squadron from Ancerville as far as Aulnois), it was reasonable to suppose that it had not retired beyond Ancerville, or at the farthest Saint-Dizier. Its attitude at the end of the day, and that of the peloton of Hussars which had evacuated Lavingcourt without fighting, did not indicate a very determined resistance.

But what had become of the peloton of Hussars? Why did it not now come forward to cover the rear of its infantry? This disappearance might possibly have something to do with some ambush prepared in the forest of Valtièremont. It was then necessary to be doubly cautious until the arrival of reports anxiously-expected from the advanced guard and flanking patrols.

Such were the reflections of Captain A..., when a trooper arrived with the following report:

We can see two of the enemy's horsemen on the crest of the plateau, hiding in the border of the forest.

E..

*Lieutenant, Advanced Guard.*

This was an important piece of information. Still there was not much said about it, at any rate not so much as one would like to know. What was to be done to obtain fuller information? The first thought that presented itself was to pursue the vedettes vigorously and observe the strength of the post on which they would retreat. But in order to compel the enemy's post to show itself, it would be necessary to risk a pretty strong patrol in the wood.

The fear of ambuscade was uppermost in Captain A.'s mind; he therefore preferred taking another line, and wrote the following order in pencil:

La Houpette, 2nd July, 6.45 a.m.

*To Lieut. E., with the Advanced Guard.*

Attract the attention of the enemy's vedettes. I am sending a patrol through the wood against their right and rear to try to secure them.

A..

*Captain.*

He then gave these instructions to an intelligent and active non-commissioned officer:

There are two vedettes of the enemy nearly a mile from here, at the edge of the forest, on the top of the high ground. Take four determined men with you, keep under cover in this small wood (to the south of la Houpette), and so gain the plateau in front of us. Fall on the right and rear of the vedettes, make prisoners of them and bring them to me.

The non-commissioned officer set out at the trot with his men, stealing along within the border of the small wood.

**6.50 a.m.**—The captain then mounted his party so as to be ready for any eventuality, and sent Lieut. B.. into the hamlet of la Houpette to interrogate the inhabitants and obtain some information. He soon returned with the news that the enemy's infantry had passed through the village the previous evening at 7.30, moving towards Ancerville, but it was not known where it had halted; also 25 hussars had come to requisition at the same hour, and two of them had appeared in the village at 4 o'clock this morning. The countryman did not know, or would not say, where these hussars came from or where they went to. They had not slept in the village.

According to this account it was probable that the 25 hussars were those who had been in Lavincourt, that they had passed the night in the forest, and that it was their vedettes which our advanced party had just seen on the ridge. The enemy's infantry must apparently have halted at Ancerville; but was it still there this morning?

**7 a.m.**—Suddenly three shots following each other rapidly were heard on the plateau. One of the patrols returned from Rupt wood and the Haironville road without having seen anything. Almost at the same time our patrol from Cousances and Cousancelles came in. It had seen nothing of the enemy in these villages, or beyond on the plateau; and it had found the bridges over the stream intact, the latter being moreover fordable at nearly all points.

**7.10 a.m.**—At last Serjeant L .. and his men were seen returning by the high road and bringing with them a riderless horse and one of the enemy's hussars.

*Verbal report of Sergeant L...*

When I reached the forest on the plateau, I turned to the right, through the wood, and we charged the two hussar vedettes on the road, cutting off their retreat. Being taken by surprise they had only time to fire on us at 30 paces distance, but they did not touch us. They tried to resist, but I killed one of them with my revolver, and have brought his horse; my men have taken the other.

When questioned by the captain, the prisoner replied that only his peloton was in the forest, and that they left their squadron at Saint-Dizier the day before. He knew that there were a lot of infantry at Saint-Dizier yesterday, but did not know whether they had left it this morning.

He was asked if his peloton had been at Lavincourt the evening before; he replied that it had, and that it had been driven away by superior numbers.

The examination was continued as follows :

- Q. What regiment do you belong to ?  
A. The 20th Hussars.
- Q. What brigade ? And who is your general ?  
A. 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Cavalry Division. General of Division... General of brigade...
- Q. Where is your general ?  
A. I do not know.
- Q. What corps d'armée are you attached to ?  
A. I do not know.
- Q. Where were you to have gone to-day ?  
A. I do not know.
- Q. Where is the main body of the army ?  
A. They say it is at Châlons, but I do not know.
- Q. How many men are there in your squadron ?  
A. A hundred.
- Q. Have you lost many men ?  
A. Yes, a good many lately at the battle at ——, and ten horses since then.
- Q. Do you find supplies plentiful ?  
A. Not very.
- Q. Is there any infantry at Ancerville ?  
A. Yes, a battalion arrived there yesterday evening.

The captain took his answers down rapidly in his note-book. The prisoner was then searched, and his "pocket-ledger," knife, and money were taken from him, but he was told that the latter would be returned to him in due time; no paper of interest was found about him.

It was now certain that the squadron had before it the peloton which had been driven out of Lavincourt the evening before, and that the battalion had passed the night at Ancerville. But it was by no means certain that it was there still.

The captain now had to decide what to do with his prisoner. The simplest thing was to hand him over to the rear-guard; but the colonel and the general had the previous day expressed the wish to have a

prisoner. It seemed almost certain that the brigade was by this time on the march somewhere near Aulnois, and it would not be difficult to send a prisoner there.

But it would be necessary to detach a man to conduct him, and where would this man again join the squadron?

The captain himself could not foretell this; for the nature of his mission, and eventualities which could not be foreseen, rendered it impossible to determine in advance what direction would be taken during the day, still less where the squadron would pass the night. He would, therefore, be lost to the squadron.

But, anyhow, he must transmit the information just obtained, and the account of the prisoner's examination, to the general; so that in any case a man must be detached.

The captain then decided to take this course, but not without a pang; for he foresaw that similar occurrences would happen many times during the expedition, and would eventually weaken his force very sensibly.

He then wrote the following report:

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 1.

La Houpette, 2nd July, 7.35 a.m.

*To General X..., Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on the road  
from Saint-Dizier to Stainville.*

The peloton of Hussars, which I drove from Lavingcourt yesterday evening, is now in the forest of Valtièremont. A battalion of infantry has slept at Ancerville. I do not know whether it is still there, but am going to ascertain that. I shall follow the enemy step by step. I expect to reach Blesme during the day, and destroy the railway there. Sergeant L... has killed one of the enemy's vedettes, and another has been taken, sent herewith together with the two horses. Enclosed is the examination of the prisoner. I would request that the corporal who bears this may be kept with the column, as he could not find me; he has 8fr. 30 belonging to the prisoner.

If events compel me to move far in advance of the column, I do not know how I shall send in my despatches, having no connecting posts in rear of me, nor the means of establishing them. To what telegraph station could I send despatches to the division in case of necessity?

A...

*Captain 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

The captain gave the above despatch to a corporal,\* explaining to him that he would find the general somewhere about Aulnois or beyond it. He directed him to fasten the prisoner's feet to the stirrups with a forage-cord, and to fasten the bridle of the led horse to his own cloak-strap; the corporal set out for Aulnois with the prisoner and two horses.

It should be added that before sending the captured horse to the rear, the captain had assured himself that it was not very strong, and was not worth exchanging with any horse in the squadron.

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\* Whenever a written despatch is sent, the bearer should always be told and made to repeat the gist of the contents (unless there are special reasons to the contrary), since he is always liable to lose it and may have to destroy it in order to conceal it from the enemy.—Tr.

## II.

**March to Saint-Dizier.—Affair at the Railway Station.—First News of the Enemy.**

**7.35 a.m.**—Although no time had been wasted, these trifling matters had caused delay. It was urgently necessary to get near Ancerville; but the enemy had probably already heard of the capture of his vedettes, and perhaps intended to take advantage of the forest to avenge himself for it. The captain therefore resolved to turn this dangerous locality by the south; in this way he would approach Ancerville with greater security; he could at the same time watch the railway, and in working against the flank of the enemy he would have a better chance of coming across some isolated party.

The squadron moved off at the trot, keeping under cover behind the little wood of la Houpette, and made for Cousancelles. They crossed the stream there, gained 203 on the plateau, and then made for Ancerville, alternately trotting and walking; flankers being thrown out, who kept along the border of the wood and watched the outlets from it until the rear-guard had passed them. In this way they reached the ridges, planted with trees and vines, about 1100 yards south-east of Ancerville. No vedettes or sentries were to be seen. The point searched the village, and after a few minutes signalled "all clear." The squadron then trotted round the south side of the village and gained the main road on the west side of it; the rear-guard halting when opposite the principal street, and facing to the rear; the whole protected by march-outposts.

At the same moment the rear-guard caught sight of the peloton of the enemy as it was debouching from the forest by the main road, but it had seen us, and finding itself turned retired at the gallop towards the north.

The captain at first thought of pursuing it, but it had gained such a start that there was no hope of coming up with it; it was therefore allowed to escape towards Chancenay. Thanks to the answers given by the prisoner, it was known that only the peloton of Hussars was in the forest, so that there was no further cause for anxiety on that side.

**8.35 a.m.**—Meanwhile, from the position taken up to the west of Ancerville, puffs of smoke could be clearly seen to the south, in the direction of the railway, which denoted a very active movement. The best way of finding out what to do was to push on rapidly to Saint-Dizier, where it might be possible to stop the traffic by damaging the line. Information would be obtained there, and perhaps the touch of the retreating enemy might be regained. The captain would have preferred not leaving Ancerville without questioning the inhabitants; but he was in a hurry to reach Saint-Dizier, and feared to lose precious time and the chance of a wind-fall. Besides, he would most probably find the best sources of information there.

He therefore sent to warn the rear-guard to keep extra good look-out to the rear, and again pushed on.

In the advanced guard, Lieut. E... had utilised the time to have the entrance to the Vert-Bois wood explored; he had even sent a patrol to the south border, who reported that there was a very heavy train on the line, facing towards Saint-Dizier, but at a stand-still and whistling continuously.

These precautions having been taken, the squadron met with no check in the Vert-Bois, which was traversed at full trot, and it continued its route without hindrance as far as the railway level-crossing. Here the captain halted, facing westward, while the advanced guard pushed its point into Saint-Dizier, and a patrol turned the town on the north.

A railway employé, who was walking along the line, was seized, and with the help of a little intimidation it was ascertained from him that Saint-Dizier had been occupied the day before by a detachment of infantry and cavalry, and that a body of infantry coming from Ancerville had passed through that very morning at 6 o'clock. The tone of his answers, however, gave rise to some mistrust and the captain did not think fit to interrogate him further, but he had him kept in view by a corporal.

A train was standing near the crossing, the engine with steam up. The captain ordered the driver to back, but the line was so blocked that it was impossible to advance or retire.

**9.15 a.m.**—Meanwhile, a non-commissioned officer of the advanced guard reported that the point had traversed the town at the gallop without seeing any of the enemy's troops within the place or at the further side of it, and that the patrol on the right had seen nothing along the railway line except a long row of wagons or engines.

The captain then issued the following orders :

*To Lieut. E..., with the Advanced Guard.*

Push on to the mairie and occupy it with all military precautions. Send for the mayor and keep him near you. Search the mairie and seize the papers there. Have the telegraph office occupied.

*To Sub-Lieut. D..., 3rd Peloton.*

Call in your rear-guard; advance to 500 metres (550 yards) from the entrance to the town and halt there, watching the town and our rear, while I take the squadron to the railway station. Take with you the railway employé we have seized and do not let him escape.

Having thus given them their instructions, the captain moved off at the trot with his 1st and 2nd pelotons and made for the railway station which he reached at 9.30.

**9.30 a.m.**—He at once dismounted half the 2nd peloton and entered the telegraph office, where the greatest activity prevailed. The two clerks were at once seized. The station master was also found there, and was in the act of tearing up the register of despatches, which was seized. The chief and assistant station master and the employés were locked up in the station master's office and watched.

Among others the following telegrams were found in the register of despatches :

No. 695.

29th June, 5.50 p.m.

*Station Master, Saint-Dizier, to Station Master, Châlons, and Intendant General.*

Great block at station. 5 heavy trains arriving from Chaumont. When road is clear shall send them on to Châlons. Empty wagons, and wagons loaded with flour, biscuit, oats. Shall afterwards send spare empties. Road intact from Chaumont, but blocked. Reported approach of enemy's cavalry.

No. 720.

Saint-Dizier, 30th June, 6.30 a.m.

*General X... to General-in-Chief, Camp, Châlons.*

Received your telegram of 29th June, 1 a.m. Am withdrawing my division to Châlons. A stray battalion of the 112th is at Ancerville without orders. Have ordered it to push as far as Aulnois to obtain information and then to retire on Châlons. Am leaving with it a peloton of hussars for scouting purposes.

Captain A.... seeing such a number of wagons accumulated at the station, and remembering his instructions, did not feel inclined to let them reach Châlons; and as he was himself obliged to leave Saint-Dizier, his only way of ensuring this was to damage the line: but everything necessary to effect this was wanting, time, tools, and workmen.

But on going up the line with a few dismounted men as escort, he observed a train, the engine of which had steam up and was only waiting for the line to be cleared to start. Not far from it, near the goods platform, were some large blocks of stone intended apparently for building purposes. He had two of these blocks placed on the up line, 100 metres (110 yards) from the engine. He then went to the engine, made the driver and stoker get down, turned on the steam, adjusted the lever for going ahead, and jumped off the engine. The engine started and ran into the blocks of stone, ran off the rails and upset on the line, smashing the leading wagons.

He calculated that he could easily reach Blesme by the time they had cleared the line, and prevent all trains passing that place. At the same time he had the feeding pipes of the water tank cut open with a knife, and directed Sub-Lieut. C.... to throw down two or three telegraph poles while he himself went to the mairie.

**9.40 a.m.**—On arriving there he found the mayor in the main hall with Lieut. E.... The papers of the office were seized. Among them was found the rough draught of an assessment return for executing a requisition for rations for 450 men and 400 horses, dated 29th June. When questioned on several points the mayor refused to reply, in spite of all the threats that were held out to him. The same was the case with the clerk of the mairie. But the wife of the schoolmaster, when pressed and threatened that her husband would be taken away as prisoner, admitted that a strong body of cavalry and guns had arrived in the town on the evening of the 28th, had staid there during the 29th, and started towards Châlons on the morning of the 30th. She added that a general, too, was with them, but did not know his name. Other troops had slept in the surrounding villages: Ancerville, Chancenay, Bettancourt, and even in the fields. When asked about the number of these troops, she said she did not know, but there were horses all over the place.

The captain called upon the mayor to have large quantities of provisions and oats got ready, for at least 2,000 men and as many horses, and to apprise the neighbouring communes to prepare as much; for, he added, a large force is approaching, and the best way to ensure good treatment for the town, is to lay in a good store of provisions ready for the troops.

Some of the inhabitants who had been questioned by a non-commissioned officer in the square of the mairie had given similar information, and had also added that a battalion of infantry had passed through the town, without stopping, at 7.30 a.m., coming from the direction of Ancerville.

On opening the register of correspondence of the town telegraph office, the following was read:

No. 1837.

Saint-Dizier, 28th June, 8 p.m.

*General .... to General-in-Chief at Châlons.*

Third Cavalry Division just reached Saint-Dizier. Shall canton here to-night. To-morrow shall push reconnaissances along the Marne and towards the Ornain. Enemy has not pursued. My troops are much fatigued. Effective strength of regiments about 350 sabres. Half camp equipage lost.

No. 3520.

Châlons, 29th June, 4 p.m.

*General-in-Chief to General X..., Saint-Dizier.*

Remain at Saint-Dizier until further orders. Find out and let me know if enemy has appeared on Ornain or Marne. Order railway to send back provision trains to Châlons and empty stock to Epernay.

No. 1915.

Saint-Dizier, 29th June, 5 p.m.

*General.... to General-in-Chief, Châlons.*

Reply to your 3520. My reconnaissances met nothing on the Saulx. Mayor of Ligny telegraphs numerous cavalry at Saulx-en-Barrois. Mayor of Gondrecourt wires enemy in force at Vaucouleurs. Prefect of Meuse sends word Bar-le-Duc not yet occupied this morning. Order to railway going to be executed, but line much blocked.

No. 3950.

Châlons, 30th June, 1 a.m.

*General-in-Chief to General...., Saint Dizier.*

Withdraw your division immediately to Châlons. Bring with you gendarmerie of Saint-Dizier and Vitry. Leave orders at Saint-Dizier to destroy telegraph at first approach of enemy and break up railway as soon as station is cleared.

Meanwhile, it had been forgotten to seize the letters at the post-office. A non-commissioned officer was sent with all speed, but was too late; the post-master being forewarned had burnt all the letters, or at any rate had hidden them so well that they could not be found. Fortunately abundant information had already been obtained; and when all the items were compared one with another they were found to agree perfectly and to furnish conclusive results. It was necessary to communicate them at once to the division.

The captain therefore drew up the following despatch in duplicate.

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 2.

Saint-Dizier, 2nd July, 9.50 a.m.

*To General X..., Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on the road  
from Saint-Dizier to Stainville.*

According to information obtained and despatches seized, the 3rd Cavalry Division of enemy, General ...., left Saint-Dizier on 30th June for Châlons. I send you the registers of despatches seized. The battalion 112th and peloton of Hussars who were yesterday at Aulnois passed through Saint-Dizier this morning, moving towards Châlons. Great block at Saint-Dizier railway station. Large quantities of supplies in trucks. I have had a train thrown off the rails to prevent their being moved. The line is useless for several hours to come. I am going to Blesme, where I shall effect more important demolitions.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

The captain selected one of the one-year-volunteers, who could read a map, and gave him one copy of the above despatch, together with the registers of despatches seized at the railway and town telegraph offices, directing him to hand over the whole to the first officer with troops that he might meet, to be transmitted to the proper person. He was ordered to keep along the right bank of the Marne as far as Chamouilley, avoiding the forest of Valtièremont, to pass through Cousances, Cousancelles, and Aulnois, and to push as far as Stainville if necessary ; lastly, he was to stay with the troops he might meet, or ask to be sent to his regiment. The captain gave him a sketch of his route.

Another trooper was selected, to whom the other copy of the despatch only was given. He was ordered to go by Ancerville, Aulnois, as far as Stainville if necessary.

Both were directed to be careful not to allow themselves to be taken, and to destroy the despatches rather than let the enemy get them.\*

By sending the despatch in duplicate by different routes, it was pretty certain that it would reach its destination.

### III.

#### Halt at Saint-Dizier.†

**10 a.m.**—Well pleased with having been so lucky at the beginning of his enterprise, Captain A.... thought of following up his clue to Blesme, as ordered. But it was 10 o'clock. Perhaps it was the best time to let both men and horses rest and eat, for there might be plenty to do during the day and they ought to be in good condition for it. At any rate this was the captain's opinion.

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\*See note p. 19.— De Brack recommends that a report should be written very small on a little piece of paper and either placed in the glove (the bearer being ordered to swallow the paper if attacked and overpowered), or rolled up in a piece of paper and placed in the barrel of a pistol ; in the latter case it could be destroyed by firing the pistol.—Tr.

†See Map 1.

But before quitting the mayor he asked him many questions regarding the villages of Arrigny and Saint-Remi-en-Bouzemont, situated 20 kilometres (12½ miles) to the west but on the left bank of the Marne. "I intend to go there this evening," said he, "and I want to know if the enemy has appeared there, and if I shall find subsistence for my men and horses, and places to canton in." The mayor replied in evasive terms. The captain asked these questions with the object of putting the enemy on the wrong scent, for notwithstanding the destruction of a few telegraph posts and wires he had no doubt that directly after his departure the mayor would find some means of signalling that he had passed there. If now the enemy could be enticed to send his forces to the left bank of the Marne in the hope of effecting a surprise there, he would have a wild goose chase, and the squadron would have all the more chance of not being disturbed on the right bank, where it would have it all to itself. It was a good idea to stop all telegraphic communication, but he could only do that by completely destroying the apparatus, or carrying off the station master, the telegraph clerks, and even the mayor.

Now a complete destruction of the telegraph was contrary to the views and intentions of the general; for his instructions of the previous day recommended him to damage the railway at the Blesme junction so as to stop the traffic, but with regard to the telegraph they only called for the temporary delay of despatches. Moreover, according to the instructions, the cavalry division would continue its movement on Saint-Dizier, and consequently the telegraph would be of the greatest service hereafter. Certainly a few posts had been felled, and a few wires cut, but less than this would not have sufficed even for the security of the squadron during its stay at Saint-Dizier; and the damage done was so slight, and so easily repaired, that it could do no possible harm. Further, it was quite in accordance with the spirit, if not with the letter, of the instructions to obstruct the line at Saint-Dizier, for that was the only means of preventing the trains drawn up at the station escaping towards Châlons.

As to the idea of carrying off the mayor, station master, and telegraph clerks, it presented so many difficulties that the captain did not entertain it at all. It would have necessitated requisitioning a carriage, the watching of which would have caused more embarrassment than the advantages of the proceeding were likely to compensate. Indeed it was useless to carry off the mayor, as any inhabitant could have gone to the nearest place and sent off a despatch which nothing could have stopped.

Having taken all these things into consideration, the captain sent back the 4th peloton (from the mairie) to join the main body at the station, and, addressing the mayor for the last time, said "I warn you, Sir, that if any attempt is made against us by the inhabitants, and even if the news of our arrival is signalled, your town will bring upon itself a punishment which it will long remember."

**10.5 a.m.**—At 10.5 o'clock the 1st, 2nd and 4th pelotons were collected at the Saint-Dizier railway station. The 3rd peloton, forming

the rear guard, was watching at 500 metres (550 yards) from the entrance to the town on the road to Ancerville. A little to the east of the station there was a running stream ; the squadron was moved up to it and the order given to water by pelotons in succession, and to feed the horses ; two pelotons to feed first, and the third afterwards. The rear-guard was directed to water too, provided it could find water without quitting its post, but to feed with oats in any case.

It was only at this moment, when giving orders to the different parties, that the captain perceived that a great mistake had been made : when the station was occupied some look-out men were posted all round it, and a peloton had been left on the road to Ancerville, but there was not a single look-out man on the main road to Vitry, nor on the left bank of the Marne. Indeed, for a whole hour they had actually been so situated, that any small party of the enemy suddenly arriving from Vitry or Vassy could have completely surprised the squadron and cut them all down with ease.

Who, then, was responsible for this grave fault ? The captain, without doubt. Still it must be said (not by way of justification, or even of excuse, but merely to explain his conduct), that ever since his arrival at Saint-Dizier the captain had been overwhelmed with occupations, of which the first and most urgent was to throw himself on the station and telegraph-office, to seize the despatches and block the road, so as not to lose the results of the important information already obtained. Even at the post-office he had arrived just too late, so that there was not a minute to spare. Now it was this feverish haste, although quite necessary, which caused him to lose sight of the not less important duty of securing the squadron against surprise. Hardly had the captain seized the railway station, when he rushed off to the mairie ; in his anxiety to do his best, he thought no more about securing his safety. Certainly it was a serious error, and if any accident had happened nothing in the world could have cleared him.

It should however be added that it was incumbent on Lieut. B..., who commanded the detachment at the station, and even on Sub-Lieut. C..., to draw their captain's attention to this matter, for such an omission could not have escaped them ; and as they were less pre-occupied with the general management of the enterprise, they ought to have been all the more attentive to the details of its execution. If they did not think of this at first, they ought later on at any rate, in the absence of the captain, to have taken upon themselves to place a vedette on the Vitry road and also on the left bank of the Marne.

*A subordinate ought to take this view of his functions. He not only has the right, but it is his duty, to refresh the memory of his chief and to supplement any omissions that he may make, either by asking for orders or giving them himself in case of necessity.* This instance shows, in fact, that a chief cannot always think of everything, for the powers of the human mind are limited ; and the more one is pre-occupied with general questions, the more liable is one to lose sight of details.

The captain took advantage of the occasion to impress this upon his officers ; he did this without harshness, and was most careful to

take the chief part of the blame to himself. This indeed is the right way to act in such cases, if one would avoid being lowered in the eyes of one's inferiors. The error was at once repaired, and the horses watered.

**10.10 a.m.**—As the day promised to be a hard one, it would have been well to secure the men a substantial meal. They had with them the bread and half the meat of yesterday. It was not possible to let them make soup, but they could at least be cheered with a little wine. Accordingly Sub-Lieut. C... was sent to the town to requisition 65 litres of wine ( $\frac{1}{2}$  litre per man), and to have it brought immediately to the station. He was directed at the same time to buy something for the officers' breakfast, and a non-commissioned officer, two troopers, and two officers' orderlies were sent with him.

The mayor was still at the mairie ; Sub-Lieut. C... gave him a bond, and the requisition was executed without delay.

While the men and horses were eating, the captain, looking again round the railway station, observed that several trucks were loaded with corn. It took but a short time to have two sacks unloaded by the porters and carried to the squadron. They were emptied into the nose-bags and so a reserve of about half a ration was kept, which might be very useful in the evening if circumstances prevented their getting near any village. A detached squadron can only subsist by taking such precautions as these. It may be objected that one ought not to overload the horses. Quite true, but they must eat. The requisition system works very well, no doubt, especially in the case of small bodies ; but a squadron, isolated in the presence of an enemy, will often be compelled by prudence to avoid villages, and even farms,

We must then approve of the foresight of a chief who takes care to keep a little stock in hand for emergencies. In this particular case it was certainly right to do so. One could not be sure that in advancing to resume contact, some hostile detachment would not be encountered ; and that it would not be necessary to take refuge, or even to bivouac in a wood, in order to track the enemy. How then could one requisition in such a case, especially in the enemy's country, where the first countryman will denounce your presence if he feels sure that he can do so with impunity ? Moreover an extra stock is never thrown away, even if one finds oneself in the midst of plenty. Double étapes, double rations, is a principle which does no harm.

The peloton officers had relieved their look-out men so as to feed all the horses, and when the meal was finished the whole mounted and the march was resumed on the high road to Châlons. About  $1\frac{1}{4}$  hours had been spent at the halt.

Some cavalry officers will not approve of the captain's action in having waited to feed with oats. They will perhaps say that it was time lost, and corn wasted ; for it was important to reach Blesme as soon as possible, and oats eaten *en route* digest badly, making the horse dull instead of invigorating him.

We shall not contest the latter theory, which is quite true in principle. But, in order to justify the captain, we will reply that no one knew

at what hour in the evening there would be an opportunity for feeding the horses. Now exaggeration is not good in anything, and the horse's stomach will not remain empty long with impunity. Whether the corn be completely digested or not, is a matter of but little importance, a small feed does not make a horse very dull, and it at any rate enables him to wait for a more substantial meal without suffering. It would be quite another thing if he were fed with hay.

## IV.

### **March to Blesme. Destruction of the Railway. Fresh Information.**

**11.30 a.m.**—Where could the battalion of the 112th be now? At 7.30 it had passed through Saint-Dizier. That was known beyond a doubt. Marching at the rate of 4 kilometres ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles) an hour, without stoppages, it ought now to be nearly half way between Perthes and Thiéblemont. But the peloton of Hussars, what had become of it? We remember that after catching sight of our squadron at the entrance to Ancerville, when itself debouched from the forest of Valtièremont, the peloton retreated towards the north for fear of being cut off. It had probably turned down from Chancenay and gained the Châlons road, following the infantry. But had it moved from there along the railway, or even skirting the woods, for fear we should arrive before them about Hallignicourt?

The captain discussed this with Lieut. B.... as they rode along. Both hypotheses were admissible, and the uncertainty was not dissipated by the ordinary method of resolving such questions, viz. asking oneself "What should I do were I in the enemy's place?"

Fortunately, there was no occasion to trouble oneself much about it. It was known that the peloton was isolated, and even if it were encountered near Blesme, it would be easy to make head against it and destroy the railway in spite of it. It was most to be feared that if it were again met with it might give the alarm in Vitry, and so cause a more important detachment to be sent out which might be capable of inflicting real injury on the squadron.

Now it was known, since the seizure of the enemy's despatches, that a cavalry division had quitted Saint-Dizier for Châlons on the 30th June. It ought to have passed the night at Vitry and left again on the 1st July; but it was not unlikely that it had left a strong rear-guard there. In that case the squadron must look out for itself if it persisted in attempting to make a dash on the Blesme railway station. But the order was perfectly plain, and did not admit of any wavering; the task assigned was to positively regain touch of the enemy, and to reach the junction at Blesme.

While on the march, the captain called his peloton leaders together and again impressed upon them the instructions which he had received, insisting strongly on the necessity of carrying them out at any cost. "Something may happen to me," said he, "and you ought to know

what you would have to do in that case.\* In my opinion there will be the least danger if we make our dash at Blesme rapidly, before the enemy has time to get wind of what we are about. This done, our mission will be much more simple, for we shall only have to keep in contact with the enemy without losing sight of him, but it will not then be necessary to engage superior forces. You know, gentlemen, that in rear of us our division is marching towards Châlons, so that our retreat would be quite secure if we were absolutely compelled to retire."

They had just reached the canal bridge on the Châlons road. Each officer rejoined his peloton and they broke into the trot. The 4th peloton still formed the advanced guard and preceded the column at about 600 metres (650 yards), its point some 400 metres (440 yards) in advance. Two men rode as connecting links between the squadron and its advanced guard, and two others between the advanced guard and its point. There was no real fear for the left flank, since it was protected by the canal; but still, whenever they met with a bridge, two men were pushed by the advanced guard some 500 or 600 yards on the opposite bank. On that side the plain extended quite open as far as the Marne, the outline of which could be guessed by the eye. On the right, the ground was flat and open along the roadside, but further away the horizon was bounded on the north by the slopes of the great forest of Troisfontaines, and to the west by the Garenne de Perthes, a wood of medium extent which comes pretty close down to the road.

After trotting for about a kilometre (1,100 yards), the captain halted and gave this order to a non-commissioned officer of the 1st peloton :

"Take 6 men and trot as far as the north edge of the wood of Perthes, which you see in front of you. Follow the border, searching the paths that lead into the wood, and send two men along the railway. You will rejoin me on the west side of the forest, at the exit of the main ride through it. I shall follow this ride with the main body of the squadron. If by chance you do not find me at the outlet of the forest, rejoin me at the village of Perthes. Don't lose any time."

He showed him the lie of the ground on the map, especially the streams which traverse and bound the forest.

Moving up then to the advanced guard, he said to Lieut. E... :

"I do not care about going through the village of Hallignicourt. Let a few men skirt the southern border of the Garenne, and let a non-commissioned officer and two men quietly search the village. I want you to reconnoitre the entrance to the forest on the east, and, if it is clear, to trot down the ride which runs through it. You must scout well the exit and wait for me there."

**12.10 p.m.**—After giving these orders, the object of which was to avoid passing through Hallignicourt for fear of raising an alarm, the captain returned to his squadron, and took an oblique direction to the

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\*As a rule, not only every officer, but every man in a reconnoitring party should have explained to him the object of the mission and the means by which it is proposed to attain it. The most stupid man in the detachment may be the only one who is not cut off, and may be in a position to gain very important information which he would not think of obtaining if things had not been explained to him. Moreover, a general idea of how matters stand and what is wanted cannot fail to make all ranks take more interest in the work and exercise their individual intelligence for the common end. [See "Catechism of Reconnaissance," Questions 25 and 26.]—Tr.

right across country so as to gain the entrance of the Garenne de Perthes. The advanced guard, which had preceded him to that point, lost no time in letting him know that nothing was to be seen at the border and that it had gone into the main ride. Still, before following it, the captain preferred to wait a few seconds so as to give the flankers on the left time to reach the cross-roads and reconnoitre the transverse ride which leads to Hallignicourt, where the chief danger lay. At last he entered the wood, and as the heat was oppressive, he allowed his party to walk, so as to freshen them. But the advanced guard had gained much upon them, and therefore, to insure safety, the squadron covered itself by a fresh "point"\*\* at 200 paces distance.

**1.10 p m.** — The Garenne was passed through without any mishap, and at 1.10 o'clock they had reached the far side of it. The patrols on the right reported nothing on the railway, those on the left stated that the village of Hallignicourt was unoccupied, but that at the border of the wood, about opposite la Bobotte farm, the grass was freshly trampled on and the remains of victuals were strewn on the ground, as if a body of men had quite recently halted there to breakfast. The captain complimented the dragoon who had had the good sense to make this observation. Too often indications of this sort, although described in all the books, are neglected by the men, and any amount of valuable information is thus lost. There was no doubt that they were on the heels of the battalion of infantry retreating upon Châlons.

Allowing that it had halted one hour, the captain calculated that the battalion having passed through Saint-Dizier at 7.30 a.m. ought now (1.10 p.m.) to be nearly at Thiéblemont, and that it would probably be at Vitry about 3 o'clock.

Such being the case, what ought he to do ?

The business of the squadron was to follow the enemy step by step without losing sight of him ; about this there was no doubt. But it also had an equally positive order to break up the railway at Blesme, and there was no ground for considering that this part of the task might be dispensed with after what had already been done at Saint-Dizier. For besides the fact that the partial demolitions effected at the latter station could be easily repaired, the station at Blesme was a much more important one, owing to the junction there of the Langres and Strasbourg lines.

To recover contact with the enemy and to destroy the Blesme station, that was the double object to be attained before night. But where to commence ? By making for Thiéblemont they would get nearer the enemy and probably come up with them within two hours about opposite Vauclerc. But this would be to pass by Blesme, unless they turned back sharp to the right, which would entail loss of time and additional fatigue. On the other hand, by making at once for Blesme they would be giving the enemy a further start.

As generally happens in such cases, a mixed solution of the question presented itself to the captain's mind ; a solution which appeared to

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\*See Note, page 14.

meet all the exigencies of the case, and evaded the perplexity of having to choose between the disadvantages of the two other plans.

Why not march on Blesme, detaching one peloton to track the enemy? After thinking it over the captain had the wisdom not to yield to this temptation. He did not know whether Vitry was occupied by a strong cavalry rear guard, and there were even good reasons for supposing that this might be the case. A single peloton would then be running a great risk in that direction.

Again, how could one tell whether the approach of the squadron had not already been reported by the peloton of Hussars which had escaped at 8.30 that morning towards Chancenay, and no signs of which had again been seen?

Could one be sure, too, that the mayor of Saint-Dizier had not despatched a courier to Vitry by the left bank of the Marne? Or that the telegraph had not been sufficiently repaired to send a message?

If this were the case, the enemy's cavalry would certainly already be in the field. More than that, he would probably occupy the Blesme junction in a very short time. It would then be necessary to be in force at the station. Lastly there are no instances in warfare where one has lost anything by having one's forces united; and however numerous may be the calls made by the service of exploration, the less one disseminates one's force the better.

Moreover, what risk would there be? It is 33 kilometres ( $20\frac{1}{2}$  miles) from Ancerville to Vitry; about as much as a body of infantry can cover when its moral and physical powers are already weakened by defeat and fatigue. As the battalion then could not have to go beyond Vitry, or even a shorter distance, there would be plenty of time to catch it up, even after destroying the Blesme junction; whereas, if the latter mission were put off, it would perhaps be too late to execute it at all.

Acting on these reflections, the captain made for Vouillers. But, meanwhile, the advanced guard had sent to the village of Perthes, and learnt from one of the inhabitants that a body of infantry had passed about 11 o'clock; this confirmed the previous information.

The horses were now getting knocked up by the intense heat in the chalky and bare plain. Not a tree or cover of any kind was there to shade them from the scorching rays of a July sun. In his anxiety to gain time the captain attempted to trot, but after a few hundred yards the horses sweated so much and were so much blown that he could not continue the pace.

Now the day was not yet over, and great efforts might still be required; he was therefore unwilling to override the horses. A reconnaissance leader must never lose sight of such considerations as these. Certainly the horses must be worked, and not spared at all when circumstances absolutely require it. But we should not forget that the best of them are not made of iron, and that what with piquets, connecting and communicating posts, rounds of patrols, scouting here and there from the advanced guard, and the many other fatigues incident to this sort of service, a squadron will very soon be knocked up however much precaution be taken.

Nothing injures the horses more than to put on the pace during rain or great heat. What strange contradictions the exigencies of warfare present! Just now it was necessary to march rapidly so as to reach Blesme betimes, and now the pace must be diminished to preserve the horses. Herein indeed lies the great difficulty of our business. The very best reasons count for nothing if we have not the gift of adapting them to circumstances.

The squadron again took an oblique direction to the right so as to avoid Vouillers, which the advanced guard examined by merely sending two men rapidly round it, so as to be satisfied that it was not occupied.

The captain very properly took every precaution to conceal his march, for if any squadrons of the enemy were reconnoitring in the neighbourhood, he would be compelled to give up his design or would at any rate find it very difficult to accomplish. Therefore, seeing the woody slopes of the forest of Trois-Fontaines on his right, he determined to make for them so as to continue his march under cover. The squadron crossed the railway, the line there being on a level, and the horses were allowed to refresh at the little stream of la Censiére.

There are still many cavalry officers who would expect to kill their horses if they let them drink while sweating. But this is simply prejudice. There is really no danger provided they move on again immediately after. Horsemen and hunting men know this well. Of course, they must only drink in moderation, and the breast-plates should be unbuckled.

Edging off to the north, the squadron entered the wood with the usual precautions and made for Saint-Lumier-la-Populeuse. The Rû-d'Or was passed and the edge of the wood of Maurupt followed, the left being covered by flankers along the railway.

When about 700 metres (750 yards) or so south of the pond called étang du Frêne, the squadron was only about a league from the Blesme junction and the march could no longer be covered by the woods. There was therefore not a minute to lose in executing the *coup de main*. The horses were a little rested by an hour's walk in the shade of the woods. The captain then galloped up to the advanced guard and said to Lieut. E...:

"Move at full trot\* to the Blesme station, place look out-men at once all round, and seize the station master, telegraph clerks, and register of despatches. Let nothing leave the station. I shall be close after you."

The order was at once carried out, and the squadron followed its advanced guard at some distance, throwing out a fresh point in front.

It often happens, as in this case, that a squadron leader requires to throw his advanced guard rapidly on a distant point. In such a case it may have to discover the presence or absence of the enemy before

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\*The rule is here illustrated that the march towards a place to be seized should be concealed as long as possible, but on getting near it the party must move rapidly so as not to give the inhabitants time to organise any resistance, destroy or hide documents at the post, telegraph or public offices, or despatch information by telegraph or messengers.—Tr.

the main body of the squadron comes up, to stop persons who might otherwise escape or raise the alarm, seize papers before there was time to destroy them, &c., &c.; but it is too far ahead to cover efficaciously the head of the squadron in rear of it. The latter must therefore provide for its own security by throwing out a fresh advanced guard, 4 or 5 men for example, for a larger number will not be necessary.

At **2.50 p.m.** the squadron passed through Saint-Lumier, and at 3 arrived opposite the church of Blesme. Then, leaving the village on the right, the captain directed Lieut. B... to take the squadron to the station, and gave this order to Sub-lieut. C...:

“ Occupy Haussignémont and cover me to a good distance to the west and south while I destroy the station.”

He then halted until the rear-guard came up, when he gave these directions to Sub-lieut. D...:

“ Occupy the village of Blesme, and cover me to the north, east, and south, while I destroy the station. Send some men to rake up all the tools they can find at the village blacksmiths and locksmiths—such as sledge-hammers, crow-bars, cold chisels, pincers, spanners, axes, and saws—and send them to me at the station. Seize the letters at the post.”

He then galloped off to overtake the 1st peloton at the station.

**3.10 p.m.**—It had just arrived there and was formed up in the station yard, where the 4th peloton (advanced guard) had preceded it. Some men had dismounted; the station master, telegraph clerk, inspector, and two porters were there under guard; Lieut. E... had the register of despatches in his hands, and reported that there was a sentry on the station master's office, one on the telegraph office, and three on the platform, with orders to let no one enter and allow no work to go on. The point of the advanced guard was acting as vedettes 500 metres (550 yards) down the line. Lieut. E... further reported that on his arrival a rather large train escaped toward Châlons before he had time to take measures to stop it.

The captain approved of these dispositions and at once went inside the station. Three trains stood on the Strasbourg line; one consisted of empties, one contained provisions, and the third was filled with sick and wounded. The engines had steam up. The captain called for four dismounted men, and running with them towards the engines ordered the drivers to get down. One of them refused and was pulled off by force. They were then taken into the yard, together with the brakemen and a porter who was met on the line. The train of sick was accompanied by a medical officer, who came to the captain to request permission to go away, grounding his request not to be made prisoner on the convention of Geneva. “Sir,” replied the captain, “I acknowledge your neutrality, but it is impossible to let you leave now. Have you any of our wounded?” “Yes, I have two.”

The captain wished to see and question them, but both were so seriously ill that no answer could be got from them.

Evidently it would not have been right to grant the medical officer's request. For to allow the train to go to Vitry, would simply be to betray our presence, and only too lately a train had escaped in that

direction. On this account then it was necessary to lose no time in destroying the line, since the work might be interrupted at any moment. On the up line the train of sick was at the head of the convoy, and the idea of throwing it off the line could not be entertained; but on the down line the provision trains might be treated less ceremoniously.

A few paces in front there were points on the line, and it did not take long to reverse these, to mount the engine, and move ahead gently. The engine left the line, but without a jerk, and the wheels sank deep into the ballast. That line then was obstructed.

Meanwhile some dragoons arrived from the rear guard, bringing the tools gathered together in the village: two large blacksmith's sledge hammers, a crow-bar, two pairs of pincers, several chisels, an axe and three saws. They also brought a packet of letters seized at the post-office.

The captain then got together the farriers of the two pelotons with their tools, the men who carried the hatchets and saws issued as camp equipment, a serjeant and two corporals. The work was distributed thus:

The men provided with saws were to cut down the telegraph posts; those with sledge hammers, cold chisels, and axes, were told off to break the iron chairs of the rails, under the direction of a corporal.

The captain, serjeant, a corporal, and two farriers, went to some points near those where the train had been thrown off the line. An axe was placed as a wedge between the blade of the point and the rail, and the blade thus held was struck with the hammers. The point broke at the fourth or fifth stroke. The connecting rod between the lines and the lever rod were also disconnected.

After this they ran to the turntable. The bolts of the rails were broken by blows of the hammers, the rails taken up, the rollers damaged, &c. They put some rails across the line, and let some other rails fall on them, which broke or bent them; they piled up the sleepers and set them on fire\*; made holes in the water tanks; broke off the small apparatus of the engines, such as safety-valves, manometers, injecters, keys, pins, &c. By degrees both pelotons joined in the work on the line, and only sufficient men remained in the yard to hold the horses. The demolition would have been much more complete and rapid had they been provided with some of the dynamite discs used by the Austrian cavalry.

They had not yet sawn down the telegraph posts when Lieut. D... ran down the line to inform the captain that the bell in the telegraph office was ringing; probably the clerk at Vitry calling up his colleague at Blesme. This was fortunate, as the telegram might furnish some interesting information. But unfortunately neither the captain nor his officers could manipulate the apparatus. He directed Lieut. D...

\*If there is time, rails can be most easily injured by placing them across heaps of burning sleepers and bending them when red-hot; but it is best to twist them by inserting the point of a pick at both ends, when red-hot in the middle, and bearing in opposite directions.—T.R.

to use all sorts of threats to induce the clerk to receive and give up the despatch ; but all was useless, and we must add that the idea was not a happy one.

A clerk who had his wits more about him, instead of refusing to take in the despatch would have pretended to acquiesce ; he would have misrepresented the tenour of the telegram, and taken the opportunity of transmitting the news of our arrival to Vitry. Thanks to the ignorance of the officers, which would not escape the practised eye of men accustomed to the business, the latter could easily deceive them. It is therefore no use trying to play with them, for one would certainly be taken in if not thoroughly up to their professional tricks.

From this we may gather that it is most desirable that officers generally should have a practical acquaintance with telegraphy. This could very easily be done if only we were willing to take the necessary trouble.

Thus in half-an-hour the demolition of the line was complete, the telegraph posts were down, and the wires cut for a distance of 100 yards or so.

On looking over the register of despatches, only two telegrams of interest were found :

No. 186.

29th June, 1 p.m.

*Inspector at Châlons to Station Master, Blesme.*

Till further orders send all trains arriving at your station to Epernay and Rheims, unless you get distinct order of military authorities to contrary.

No. 234.

1st July, 9 a.m.

*Inspector at Châlons to Station Master, Blesme.*

Send trains of wounded to Troyes, provisions to Suippes and Grand-Mourmelon, miscellaneous freight to Châlons, empties to Epernay.

The other telegrams only referred to ordinary details of the railway. Captain A... drew up the following report :

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 3.

Blesme, 2nd July, 4 p.m.

*To General X..., Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on the road from Vitry to Saint-Dizier and Steinville.*

I have just destroyed the line and telegraph at Blesme. I enclose register of despatches seized at the station and a packet of letters. Three trains here have been rendered incapable of moving, one of wounded, one of provisions, one of empties. No appearance of the enemy. A battalion of infantry (probably that of 112th which was yesterday at Aulnois and passed Saint-Dizier this morning) marched through Perthes, 10 kilometres ( $6\frac{1}{4}$  miles) west of Saint-Dizier, at 11 a.m. It moved towards Vitry.

I am going to Vitry, where I expect to find the enemy or at any rate this battalion. It is necessary for me to know the itinerary of the General to-morrow and following days, so that I may be able to send despatches with certainty. I expect to have greater difficulty in transmitting them the further I move ahead. I do not know where I shall sleep, but shall have a post this evening at Thiéblemont or Vauclerc to receive communications which may be sent me. The post will stop there all night.

It would be very advantageous if the division were to connect itself with me by some posts, for it is impossible for me to leave relays behind to carry on my despatches.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

On the envelope, after the address, he added : "Please keep the bearer, as he cannot rejoin me."

This despatch and the telegraph register of the station were entrusted to a dragoon, who received these instructions :

"Follow the railway as far as Saint-Dizier. There take the Ancerville-Stainville road, and march on towards the east until you meet an officer with troops or a staff-officer of the division. Hand over the despatch to him to have it sent on, and stay with him, as you cannot rejoin me. Ask him to put you in the way to rejoin regimental head quarters as soon as possible."

The above despatch reveals the anxiety the captain was beginning to feel as to the transmission of reports.

Single men sent to great distances in the enemy's country are liable to lose their way, to be captured, or even killed. Certainly the instructions recommend sending despatches in duplicate or triplicate by different routes, and even to send escorts with the despatch bearers. But all this is often very difficult to do.

Here, for example, where were there several roads between Blesme and Saint-Dizier, unless indeed one of the courriers made a great détour before rejoining the high road ? Again, even if it were easy to make a duplicate of the despatch, it was impossible to do so with regard to the telegraph register.

As to sending an escort, that is seldom practicable. Three or four men are quite as likely to lose their way as one, and can defend themselves but little better. They have no chance of rejoining their squadron, and if three or four were detached for every despatch there would soon be no one left in the ranks.

We thus have nothing but connecting posts left, and the captain lays great stress on them. But the question may arise whether it was not his business to drop these as he advanced, rather than for the division to throw them out in front of it. As a matter of principle, we do not hesitate to say that it was ; but let us consider the particular case more closely.

The first occasion for using a connecting post was when the squadron reached la Houpette. But we should remember that at that time the captain had such vague ideas about the enemy, whose vedettes were seen at the entrance to the forest of Valtièremont, that he thought it prudent to make a détour by way of Cousances in order to reach Saint-Dizier. Now it would have been singularly inconsistent to leave a post there, where a whole squadron was not considered secure.

After the occupation of Saint-Dizier, matters seemed improved : the peloton of the enemy's Hussars had retired towards Chancenay, the battalion had already passed through the town and gained some distance, and it was probable that they had left nothing in rear of them. It was then 9.15 a.m. As the brigade was to have come to Ancerville to sleep, as was known, it was at that time no doubt approaching its halting place, that is, on the supposition that it had left Ménil-sur-Saulx at 5 or 6 a.m. It was therefore not worth while leaving a connecting post at Saint-Dizier for the short distance to Ancerville.

Later on, when they moved from Perthes towards Blesme, one might have been left on the line, say opposite Vouillers. But here again were difficulties. The captain intended to march for Vitry after destroying the station at Blesme; but not knowing for certain where he was going, for that depended upon circumstances, it was impossible for him to designate a point where his post should rejoin him.

It may be said that the division would have picked it up when passing it. Very true, provided it did pass that way; but as to this, while everything was possible, nothing was absolutely certain. If the division, for instance, had kept its columns on the main roads, merely sending patrols to the railway, perhaps no one would have come across this unfortunate post, and then what would have become of it? At the best they would have been four men lost, perhaps prisoners, possibly deserters. Let us try to realize the situation: how many corporals, seeing themselves thrown on their own resources, would have the energy and initiative to fall back until they fell in with their division?

In theory, looking at it cursorily, all seems simple; but in practice, when examined from a closer point of view, things become complicated and difficulties arise at every step.

In this particular case, then, it would appear that Captain A... ought not to be reproached for not having left connecting posts in rear of him; and comparing this with similar cases we necessarily arrive at the following conclusion:

*As a general rule, a contact squadron whose movements are regulated by those of the enemy, that is dependent on the unknown, ought not to leave connecting posts behind it; the bodies in rear should be held responsible for keeping up connection with it,\* and it is most advantageous that this should be done as often as the situation permits.*

The reader will judge whether the latter condition was fulfilled, so far as the division is concerned.

Before proceeding further we would make the following reflections on the incidents just narrated.

On comparing the hours mentioned in the narrative, some surprise may be felt that the captain, although in a hurry to reach Blesme, nevertheless took two hours to do it, counting from the moment of his issuing from the west end of the Garenne de Perthes. It may indeed appear that a distance of 13 kilometres (8 miles) ought under these circumstances to have been covered more rapidly. But such is not our opinion; for the captain, however anxious he might have been to push on, could not dispense with patrolling the villages of Vouillers, Saint-Vrain, and Script, on his left, nor the borders of the great wood of Trois-Fontaines and Maurupt which he was going to enter and leave behind him. It is of course understood in our narrative that

\*In many cases a peloton or smaller fraction might with advantage be attached to the squadron, to be employed only in the transmission of despatches and establishment of connecting posts. Compare the article on "Transmission of Despatches" at the end.—TR.

none of these precautions were omitted, and full allowance must be made for the loss of time necessarily entailed thereby. Further, the heat was so great that the captain could not dream of pressing the horses at the risk of knocking them up, the more so as he could not possibly tell whether it would not be necessary to demand great exertions from them towards the close of the day.

When operations are put down on paper, one is too apt to underrate distances or at any rate to rush from one episode to another without taking into consideration the thousand and one accidents which would retard them in practice. We should carefully avoid falling into this error, which would infallibly lead us to imbibe false ideas and would detract from the advantages to be gained from an otherwise improving study.

On the other hand, the captain here again committed the error which we have already reproached him with at Saint-Dizier. Certainly he did not entirely neglect to cover himself while destroying the line at the Blesme station; but the measures he took and the directions given to his subalterns were very insufficient.

A vague order to Lieut. E... to put look-out men round the station, and similar ones to Sub-Lieut. C... and Sub-Lieut. D... with regard to the rear guard, indicating two posts of observation which were far too near together; this was by no means a satisfactory mode of ensuring the safety of the squadron, especially when all the circumstances are considered and the very natural anxiety felt by the captain as to what might happen in the direction of Vitry. Thus we saw the point of the advanced guard quietly halted on the line some 500 metres (550 yards) beyond the station, a perfectly ridiculous distance in such a case; for if a post so placed sent in to announce the approach of the enemy, there would not be time to make any effective dispositions. If the captain had taken the trouble to see personally that his orders were carried out, he would certainly have seen how erroneous they were and would have modified them.

In order to cover the Blesme station, he ought to have ordered them to occupy, not Haussignémont and Blesme, which points are too near together, but Domprémy and Favresse, where Cossack posts should have been placed which would have thrown out their vedettes in all directions.

*The longer time a party requires to rally in case of attack, the greater the distance to which it should secure itself.* Such is the principle which regulates the distances laid down in the authorized instructions. It was Captain A's good luck that his squadron was not attacked when at the railway station; but if any disaster had befallen him, he would only have had his own carelessness to blame.

## V.

### M<sup>ARCH</sup> TO VITRY. CANTONMENT AT REIMS-LA-BRULÉE.

We left the captain at the Blesme station, preparing, after having destroyed the station, to pursue the object of his enterprise, viz., first

to place himself in contact with the battalion retreating on Vitry, and then to find the main body of the enemy in the direction of Châlons.

**4 p.m.**—By this time the battalion ought to have reached Vitry. The squadron then must go there to find it. But will it get there without running against superior forces? That is by no means certain, especially if the alarm has been given at Vitry either by the peloton of Hussars met with in the morning, or by the people of the train which escaped from the Blesme station.

Now it was known beyond doubt, according to the despatches already seized, that on the 30th June\* a cavalry division of the enemy was still at Saint-Dizier, and that it left there the same day for Châlons. Is it allowable to suppose that it was not covered by a strong rear-guard? From Saint Dizier to Châlons there are only two short stages. The head of the division ought to have reached Châlons yesterday evening, 1st July; but it was possible that the rearmost body had not yet quitted Vitry. It is quite true that, during his retreat, the enemy had hitherto shown himself timid rather than enterprising; and it is also true that if the squadrons of his rear-guard had really wished to keep the touch, we should have seen them ere this, and moreover they did not know whether we were closely supported. But we must also admit that they might be waiting for us in ambuscade near Marolles, or at the entrance to Vitry, which would explain why they had not as yet shown themselves. However that may be, the fear of encountering them ought not to deter the squadron from advancing; indeed just the contrary, for its mission was neither more nor less than to come in contact with the enemy. It would no doubt be more convenient to find an infantry instead of a cavalry rear-guard, for it is always easy to follow up the former without exposing one's self to its strokes, while extreme circumspection is necessary in presence of the latter. But by manœuvring cautiously one may come well off even against cavalry; provided one did not thrust one's head into the lion's mouth, the odds are that it would prefer retiring peaceably to seeking an encounter.

Such were the captain's reflections while rallying his pelotons.

But the day was drawing to a close; the horses had been on the move for twelve hours in excessive heat; it was time to stop the work for the evening and give every one some rest. Not venturing to push as far as Vitry, for fear of a skirmish, the captain decided to sleep at Reims-la-Brûlée, unless circumstances forbade it, advanced scouts being pushed up to Vitry so as to know what to be prepared for.

At 4.15 p.m. he set out again by way of Favresse. From there he detached a corporal and three men with these orders:

"To establish a connecting post on the high road to Saint-Dizier opposite Thiéblemont, to receive despatches which might arrive from Saint-Dizier, and rejoin the squadron at Reims-la-Brûlée the next day at 4 a.m. punctually. The corporal to be particular to secure his party from the direction of Vitry, and to let no inhabitant pass in that direction. He would requisition his food and forage while passing through Thiéblemont, requiring the mayor to have it sent to him on the road and to provide the men's victuals ready cooked."

**5 p.m.**—On approaching Reims-la-Brûlée, the advanced guard searched the village with great care, while on the left an officer's patrol under Sub-Lieut. C... was sent to Vauclerc to seek information.

It was 5 o'clock when the squadron arrived opposite Reims church, and march outposts were at once formed as follows: The advanced guard at the railway crossing, 1,200 metres (1,300 yards) from the village, with vedettes on the line, on the high road to Saint-Dizier, and towards the Marne-Rhine canal; a detached post at Vauclerc, to watch the road to Vitry and the ground to the south; the rear-guard at 1,300 yards to the east of the village on the road to Blesme.

The squadron formed up in a field to the north of the church and dismounted.

Particular orders were given to the vedettes to allow no one, countryman or otherwise, to pass in the direction of Vitry; a precaution so elementary, that it may appear puerile to mention it. Still it is one that should be constantly repeated whenever one is near the enemy. The men then seem to forget what they know perfectly well, and they are all the more liable to forget this common-sense precaution on account of their not being allowed to practice it in peace time, even at grand manœuvres.

Sub-Lieut. C..., on returning from Vauclerc, reported that the village had been traversed about 3 o'clock by a column of infantry coming from Thiéblemont, that it had halted there for a moment, and then continued its march to Vitry.

Meantime the mayor of Reims-la-Brûlée had been sent for. He declared that in the presence of the enemy he considered himself mayor no longer, and distinctly refused to perform the functions of his office so long as his commune was occupied. It was in vain for the captain to remonstrate with him, as he persisted in his refusal. The captain then said, "Your obstinacy can only be prejudicial to your own interests, and to those of the commune. Henceforth you are a prisoner." Then turning to Lieut. B... he said, "Occupy the mairie; seize all the papers and find for me in the register the names of the three persons who pay the highest taxes. Have these persons sent for and brought here."

He then sent the following despatch to the advanced guard:

*To Lieut. E. with Advanced Guard.*

"Establish yourself where you are as a piquet. Place your vedettes so as to guard chiefly the main road to Vitry-le-François, the parish road and railway before you, and in the direction of Vitry-en-Perthois. Patrol along the Marne and Rhine canal on your right so as to watch the passages over it. Report to me. I shall send ready-cooked food for you and men, and food for horses."

He then ordered Sub-Lieut. C...:

"Send two men and a corporal from your peloton to reinforce the detached post south of Vauclerc. While also acting as a connecting post, it will be a detached post to watch the country south of the high road. It will pass the night there and rally punctually at 4 in the morning. You will send it provisions."

Lastly, by whistling and making signals, the rear-guard was called in to the squadron, and on its rejoicing, the captain gave these orders to Sub-Lieut. D...:

"Dismount your men; but take two men with you and personally patrol to Vitry-le-François, crossing the Marne-Rhine canal and turning the town by the north. It is nearly certain that there is a battalion in it; I do not know whether there is any cavalry, but I suspect there is. Make quite sure of it by all the means in your power without compromising yourself."

He also gave the following order to a serjeant of the same peloton (the 3rd) :

"Take two men with you and patrol to Vitry. Get as near to the town as you can, either taking the main road, or, if necessary, working to the left. There is very probably infantry in the town, and perhaps cavalry. Find this out without compromising yourself. If you meet any of the country people, get some information out of them."

At 5.30 the chief taxpayers of the commune arrived, conducted by Lieut. B.... The captain spoke to them as follows :

"The mayor refuses to fulfil the duties of his office, and he is therefore a prisoner. I appoint you conjointly to replace him. Do not refuse, for you will gain nothing by it. I require immediately 181 rations of forage, each of 5.05 kilos oats and 4 kilos hay or 6 kilos straw; also 126 rations of victuals, consisting of

Bread	0.750 kilos.
Soup bread	0.250
Meat	0.400
Dry vegetables	.045
or sufficient green vegetables or potatoes.	
Salt	0.016
Sugar	0.021
Coffee	0.016
Wine	½ litre.

I also want a meal suitable for 5 officers, and a one-horse carriage. The officers' meal will be paid for in cash, and for the rest I shall give you a bond. Now you have inns and farmers in the village, and I mean the men's meal to be prepared at once, by those people and under my supervision, and with the provisions furnished by the commune.

If you refuse to comply with this requisition I shall carry you off as prisoners, and shall take the provisions by main force without counting, without paying, and without giving a receipt; in addition to which the commune will be fined 2,000 francs (£80). If necessary I shall burn two houses. Now make your choice."

This speech made an impression on the three persons. The mayor, who had heard everything, here wished to say something, but the captain forbade his doing so, and had him taken away in seclusion by two dragoons.

The chief villagers consulted each other's looks, and one of them replied, " You are the stronger, and we must obey. Indeed we were expecting you, for some of our troops passed this morning, and said they had seen you. But we cannot furnish all you want." To this the captain replied " Search well. If you really cannot produce

certain things, you must propose something else in place of them, and I will decide the quantity. But be quick, for we are hungry."

The three men consulted together, and at once set out to furnish the things requisitioned according to the totals given them by the quarter-master serjeant.

It may perhaps cause surprise that the captain should have preferred ready-cooked victuals, instead of letting the men cook them, as is usually done; but on reflection it will be seen that all this talking had taken up time. It was 5.45 o'clock. It was impossible to make the horses fast and let the men be occupied with cooking until the patrols had returned from Vitry, say for two hours; for until then it was necessary to be on the alert. Now it takes 3 hours to prepare a good soup, and the men would not have eaten before 11 p.m. if they had had to cook for themselves. This would be much too late; while, on the other hand, the victuals could be prepared by the inhabitants by 9.30.

Moreover, there were many other details to be attended to: forage to serve out, horses to groom, pay to distribute, saddlery and clothing to be repaired. Would it not be better to relieve the men from cooking, so as to enable them to attend to all these matters? Besides, this plan would ensure the men being much better in hand in case of an alarm; and in any case the soup must be prepared for the 4th peloton on piquet, and the other pelotons would hardly have time to do this for it.

The captain then went round the village, to see if he could find good and secure shelter for the horses, in case the news from Vitry authorized putting them under cover.

There were three large farm-houses with stabling, barns, and sheds, each capable of putting a peloton under cover. He ordered the farmers to clear these places by turning out the carts and other things, and satisfied himself at the same time that there was plenty of forage, which was quite natural at this time of the year.

Meanwhile the three municipal councillors themselves went round from house to house to search for the provisions which the villagers tried to hide. One of them meeting the captain reported that they could not find enough oats in the village. He told him that he must demand it from the neighbouring farms, such as that of Tournizet and Verzet, which were marked on the map, but the farmers must be required to bring it forthwith in carts; and he would take wheat, rye, and maize in place of half the oats, pound for pound.

The second official had already told off the inn-keeper and three farmers who were to prepare the men's soup. The other came to ask if salt pork would be taken in lieu of fresh meat, under the pretext that there was no butcher in the village, that no one knew how to kill or cut up a bullock, and that there were no choppers or knives fit for the purpose. The captain replied, "I will not accept any whatever. I require beef or mutton, and the only thing I will take instead is poultry, of which I see plenty running in the streets; but I shall want one fowl for 4 rations, or one goose for 8. If you are unwilling I shall help myself." Here the captain was not quite right, but no doubt he

was not aware that it takes at least 3 hours to slaughter and cut up a bullock ; and beef when quite fresh makes bad soup.

At 6.25 p.m. a dragoon brought the following report from the piquet of the 4th peloton :

2nd July, 6.15 p.m.

*Railway crossing west of Reims-la-Brûlée.*

*To Captain A... at Reims-la-Brûlée.*

My vedettes are posted; No. 1 at exit of village Marolles; No. 2 level with him on the railway; No. 3 at the canal bridge (Reims-la-Brûlée road). Nothing yet seen. I am with my peloton at railway crossing.

*E..., Lieutenant.*

At 6.35 a second report came from the same post :

2nd July, 6.25 p.m.

*To Captain A... at Reims-la-Brûlée.*

My left vedettes see two infantry sentries of enemy at the crossing of the main road and railway.

*E..., Lieutenant.*

Meantime the villagers had at last furnished the provisions demanded. There was a little of everything ; eggs, fowls, geese, a sheep, potatoes, dry and green vegetables, bread and wine. It would have been a very difficult and long business to weigh so many different things. The captain therefore, taking the advice of his sous-officiers, accepted the whole by eye, had it divided into four lots as fairly as possible, and distributed between the four houses which had been selected to do the cooking for the four pelotons. In each house a corporal was told off to superintend the cooking. If the allowance appeared insufficient, the corporals were to appeal to the captain, who would decide upon the necessity of demanding a supplementary quantity.

As to the forage, only the rations required for the piquet were removed from the houses ; the other pelotons, before putting up in the farms, ate theirs on the premises. The lucerne grass was good ; as to the grain, it consisted of 3 sacks of rye, 18 of oats, and 1 of maize, and the officer of the day had the whole mixed together and distributed at the rate of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  sacks per peloton.

The provost post (a corporal and 4 men) had been established at the mairie, where the refractory mayor was under surveillance. The horses were groomed without being unsaddled ; and a watering-place having been discovered, the captain directed that the horses should be taken there when they had eaten a little hay, a peloton at a time. He then ordered each peloton to march to the farm which had been assigned to it for the night, reconnoitring and preparing for its cantonment there with all due precautions, but the horses were not to be unbridled or fastened up until further orders ; neither were they to be unsaddled or have anything removed from the saddles all night.

He advised each officer to take a good ration of forage at his farm, but not to waste anything. Lastly, the men were distinctly forbidden to take anything whatever from the inhabitants, beyond the allowances secured for them, without paying for it. This prohibition was also

communicated to the villagers through the municipal councillors, and they were asked to complain to the officers if the slightest violence were offered them.

The patrols sent to Vitry had not yet returned, but it was a good sign. As they had been gone more than an hour, they ought by this time to be quite round the city, and as they did not return they could not have seen anything to cause alarm. Certainly some sentries of the enemy had been reported by our vedettes, but that was to be expected, as it was almost certain that the battalion of the 112th had retired on Vitry. It was quite natural that it should protect itself, but at the distance at which we were, its presence was not dangerous. Still the captain was disappointed at not having any information regarding the enemy's cavalry.

On the whole matters were relatively favourable, and every advantage ought to be taken of the situation; but the men could not be allowed to leave their horses, or undress, or even take off their swords.

The captain went round the pelotons to satisfy himself that everything was regular, and impressed upon them the necessity of examining the shoeing, saddlery, and arms. He also visited the houses where the cooking was going on, and satisfied himself regarding the preliminary preparations for the meal.

At 7 o'clock, having completed his inspection and settled these details, the captain mounted his second charger to visit the outposts. He found the piquet on the level crossing in a good position; but some of the men were not holding their horses, which were grazing on the side of the road and might easily have caught their feet in their bridles and so broken them. He reproved the peloton commander for this, and impressed upon him certain rules regarding the watchfulness to be observed and precautions to be taken. Among other things he at once had a patrol sent out towards the Marne-Rhine canal, and directed the officer to send them out frequently in that direction as well as towards the Marne, but they were forbidden to move out of a walk. They had already done enough work during the day.

The appearance of the country induced the captain to throw forward the piquet as far as the mill, 1 kilometre (1,100 yards) to the west. There, at any rate, the horses could drink, and one could be sure of the miller not escaping to report us.

At Marolles the vedettes pointed out the enemy's sentries, who could be but hazily distinguished at the point where the line crossed the high road. Nothing could be seen towards the south-east in the direction of the Saint-Dizier canal. He visited the vedette post on the railway, from which point the same sentries of the enemy were equally visible. He would have liked to visit the third vedette post at the bridge, but was anxious to return to Reims to receive the reports of the patrols, which ought to be there very soon.

**8 p.m.**—It was 8 o'clock when he rejoined the squadron. Sub-Lieut. C... and the serjeant of the 3rd peloton had just returned.

*Verbal Report of Sub-Lieut. C...*

I crossed the Marne canal and made for Vitry-le-François. On the Bar-le-Duc road I saw two of the enemy's sentries. I turned them on the north so as to get near the town. But one of them doubled back and probably reported my presence, for when I got within 500 metres (550 yards) of the town I saw two or three foot-soldiers come out, who fired on me. I then moved further off and continued to observe, keeping out of range; but no one came out of the town, and I saw the sentry rejoin his comrade. The approaches to the town are quite clear of people, and I did not meet a single inhabitant to question.

*Verbal Report of the Serjeant.*

Beyond Marolles I saw two of the enemy's sentries on the high road, 1,100 yards from our vedettes. I kept to the left towards the Marne, and on another road which runs along the river I saw two more sentries, who also saw me, as one of them ran towards the town. A moment afterwards a patrol of 4 horsemen approached me, moving along the canal. As soon as they saw me they pulled up, and then went about; but soon afterwards they crossed the canal at a bridge and went at the walk on the Marolles side. I wanted to follow them, but the sentries on the road prevented my going any further. On the canal side I met a countryman who was making for the town. I could not make myself understood so as to ask him questions, but I made him turn back.

Now what was to be concluded from these reports? That the battalion occupied the town, and that very probably the only cavalry it had was the peloton of Hussars which we already knew about. There could be no doubt that if any portion of the cavalry division still remained at Saint-Dizier we should already have seen his outposts, or at any rate his patrols; for having been warned of our approach since the arrival of the battalion of the 112th, he would have been anxious to know the strength and the distance of our supports. Presumptive evidence of this sort is as good as certainty, and we shall generally have to be content with it; for even the boldest scouts cannot always get positive proof of a fact which must nevertheless be considered almost certain.

In short, the prospect was good. The captain gave orders to fasten up the horses without unsaddling them, and strictly prohibited the men from leaving their stables or sheds; he then had the oats and hay, &c., served out, and requisitioned lanterns from the village to light the stables. At the same time he fixed the alarm post of the squadron at 1,100 yards from the village on the road to Favresse.

About 9 p.m. the soup was fit to eat; the requisitioned cart was therefore brought up, and laden with the forage, bread, and soup for the men on piquet, and the officer's meal. The quartermaster-corporal and a dragoon were told off to accompany the cart, and the following despatch was sent by them to Lieut. D...

According to report of patrols there are sentries of enemy on all the roads radiating from Vitry-le-François; four men of his cavalry have been seen patrolling near the canal. They retired before ours and crossed over to the Marolles side. The alarm-post for squadron is at 1,100 yards east of Reims-la-Brûlée, on the Favresse road (by which we arrived this evening). Send your night reports (if any are necessary) to the provost-post (mairie of Reims-la-Brûlée). I shall send you orders to-morrow morning.

A..

*Captain.*

The captain issued the orders for next day : Water at 4 a.m., horses to be given a handful of oats, rubbed down, and made ready to start.

At 9.30 the men could at last have their meal. At 10 they lay down on the straw, some at the side of their horses, others in the lofts above the sheds.

If we bear in mind that the men had only had a light meal at 10 a.m., that they had been up since day-break and in the saddle or on their legs for 16 hours, it must be acknowledged that they had had a hard day of it ; and so had the horses, for from Stainville to Reims-la-Brûlée the squadron had covered about 49 kilometres ( $30\frac{1}{2}$  miles). Taking into account the distance of the piquet, the constant moving backwards and forwards between the advanced guard and the main body of the squadron, the rounds of the patrols, and transmission of orders, we may safely calculate that a good half of the horses had covered 60 kilometres (37 miles) or more.

Now, this was a great deal to do, especially in the heat, and yet not one hour had been lost or a mile too much gone over. Merely the natural course of events had already taken the squadron 50 kilometres (over 30 miles) from its starting-point, after a 16 hours' march and various other work.

We see from this example, which is not at all exaggerated, that the rôle of a contact squadron is by no means a sinecure ; and it would be well if we were thoroughly imbued with the idea that it can only properly acquit itself of its task by making very great efforts. On this account no precautions should be neglected for husbanding one's powers ; such as dismounting at every halt, not hurrying the pace without really good reason, not employing more men on detached duties and patrols than are absolutely necessary, putting both men and horses under as comfortable cover as possible at night, not disturbing their rest without good cause, and lastly, getting them as substantial meals as the resources at our disposal may allow of.

Just as the officers were getting up from the table, a man from the connecting post at Thiéblemont brought the following despatch :

*1st Cavalry Division.*

No. 600. Saint-Dizier, 2nd July, 5.30 p.m.  
*For Connecting Post at Thiéblemont or Vauclerc, for transmission to Captain A., Commanding 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

Received your despatches as under :

- No. 1. From la Houppette, with a Hussar prisoner.
- No. 2. From Saint-Dizier (with two registers of despatches), in duplicate.
- No. 3. From Blesme, with one register of despatches and one packet of letters.

Carry on your enterprise now by endeavouring principally to get contact with the enemy's main body, without allowing yourself to waste time with insignificant detachments. To-morrow, 3rd July, the advanced guard of the dragoons will reach Thiéblemont, with flankers at Blesme and Arrigny. Let me know as soon as possible whether Vitry-le-François is occupied and by what forces, and if you have any news of the enemy's army ; also your whereabouts for to-morrow evening, so that I may be able to communicate with you. Report if you consider Serjeant L. to have deserved proposal for a medal. Impossible for the Division to establish connecting posts with

you. Transmission of information will doubtless be difficult for you, but I rely on your zeal and initiative to overcome the difficulty.

By order of General commanding 1st Cavalry Division,

M.,

*Colonel, Chief of Staff.*

The captain communicated this despatch to his officers, so that they might know what was wanted next day. On one of them asking him what course he intended to pursue in order to ascertain the presence and force of the enemy in Vitry, he replied that he had not yet decided and would think it over. "In any case," he added, "we may congratulate ourselves on the incredible carelessness of the enemy, for if he had only covered himself to a greater distance, as he ought to have done, our outposts would not have been able to get so close to Vitry; we ourselves could not have cantoned so near the town, and we should have much greater difficulty in finding out what is going on there."

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## 3 RD J U L Y .

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### I.

#### **Reconnaissance of Vitry-le-François.\***

The night passed quietly in the cantonment at Reims-la-Brûlée. The next day, 3rd July, at 5.30 a.m., the squadron was ready; the piquet at the mill and the Cossack-post at Vauclerc had come in, and the horses had been watered and fed. The reports indicated no change in the situation, and showed that the enemy's sentries were still to be seen at 4.45 a.m. on the posts they occupied the day before.

The captain directed his officers to look to the shoeing. He told off the 1st peloton (Lieut. B...) for the advanced guard†, the 2nd for the rear-guard, and marched off in the direction of Vitry-en-Perthois, taking the bye-road which leads to Saint-Etienne.

A small patrol covered the left flank, moving along the stream. At 6.45 the advanced guard had searched and passed Vitry-en-Perthois; at 7, the main body of the squadron having reached the junction of roads at the north of the village, the rear-guard received the order to halt on the south at the end of the bridge, on the left bank of the Saulx.

The rear being thus secured, the captain made the following dispositions :

#### *Verbal Order.*

#### *To the 3rd Peloton Officer, Sub-Lieut. D..*

Push toward the north-west as far as the high road to Châlons; search on that road for the enemy's battalion, which has most probably left Vitry this morning, and report to me. If it has already gained on us towards the north, follow it up without compromising yourself; but if it is to be seen further south, towards Vitry, observe it as long as you can follow it up without danger. I shall be on the Châlons road in an hour's time, and at 9 I shall be at the loop in the road on the height at 208. Wait for me there. In any case be there at 9. Whoever arrives first will wait for the other.

#### *Verbal Order.*

#### *To the 2nd Peloton Officer, Sub-Lieut. C.. (Rear-guard).*

Take half your peloton with you and push on to Vitry-le-François. Do your best to get into the town. You must let me know whether it is occupied or not, and by what arms. You will rejoin me here. Try to be back in an hour. If you see the enemy's battalion marching from Vitry towards the north, do not let that prevent your entering the town, as you have another road at your disposal. In this case let me know at once. Be at 208 on the Châlons road at 9, if you do not find me here.

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\* See Map 2.

† The advanced guard should always be furnished by troops, &c., in turn.—TR.

**7 a.m.**—These orders given and their execution begun, the main body of the squadron threw out march-outposts and dismounted at the forked-road north of Vitry-en-Perthois.

But the captain was not satisfied that he had done enough to carry out the order, which directed him to reply clearly to the question: Is Vitry occupied, yes or no, and by what force? Certainly if the enemy had left the town, Sub-Lieut. C... could get in without trouble, and obtain the information required. But as it is surrounded by old ramparts which can still be utilised, a few gendarmes or armed inhabitants would be able to prevent a weak detachment from entering the place, without the latter even knowing for certain by what forces it had been driven back.

He therefore resolved to get the information in another way. Taking a few dragoons and an intelligent serjeant with him, he entered the village and arrested the first inhabitant he met. "Take me," said he, "to any one who has a cart and a good horse, otherwise I will carry you off prisoner."

The villager, after some hesitation, conducted him to a butcher, and the captain taking the butcher apart in the midst of his escort, said to him: "You will at once put your horse in the cart and place yourself at my disposal; otherwise I shall take your turn-out by force and shall carry you off prisoner, and the village will be mulcted in a heavy fine by the corps d'armée which follows me. You must also give me one of your every-day suits of clothes."

The butcher, being intimidated, obeyed. Serjeant P... put on the civil clothes and took his loaded revolver and some spare cartridges, his military clothing, &c., being taken on the saddles of the escort. Thus disguised he got into the cart, took the reins, and made the butcher sit beside him. He was ordered to enter Vitry at full trot, to drive through the streets of the town, to make certain whether the enemy occupied it and if so with what arms, and to observe what were the uniforms and numbers of the regiments. The captain added "You will rejoin me here. Try to be back at eight o'clock. I shall wait for you, but don't spare the horse. No doubt you will meet a patrol of ours with Sub-Lieut. C... which I have sent to Vitry; but whether he has got into the town or not, that must not prevent your getting in yourself."

With a few strokes of the pencil the captain made a rough sketch of the roads and town, and provided with this, Serjeant P... set out at the trot.

The captain dismounted the rear guard, sufficient security being ensured by some vedettes in rear; he glanced at the saddlery, kit and shoeing, observed the look of the horses and the appearance of the men, and after making some remarks on all these points rejoined the squadron with his escort.

The main body of the squadron at the fork of the road to the north of Vitry-en-Perthois consisted of the 4th peloton only. The 3rd had gone to explore the high road to Châlons, the 2nd formed the rear guard, and the advanced guard was halted 800 metres (nearly 900

yards) further north on the left branch of the road, having thrown out march-outposts.

At this point let us see whether the forces of the squadron were judiciously distributed. We do not think that they were. The peloton which had been sent on the high road to search for the battalion, could not have ventured to fight; all it could do was to observe, keep a prudent distance out of rifle-shot, and report. For this end a few troopers would have done the work better and compromised themselves much less; in fact the rôle to be played was exactly that of small groups, called officers' or non-commissioned officers' points in the Regulations. The peloton leader should have been sent in the proper direction, accompanied by 3 or 4 troopers to carry in information, and no more. In detaching the whole peloton, the captain employed too many, took it unnecessarily out of the horses, and placed himself in the position of having only one peloton in hand to meet any unforeseen exigency. Such errors are often committed through not sufficiently considering the speciality of the rôle assigned to each detachment.

*There are some detachments which cannot be too strong, namely, when it is intended that they shall fight; and there are others which cannot be too weak, which is the case when we only want to see—the most usual thing. The only exception to this rule is that if our points are likely to meet patrols of the enemy, they should be of such strength as not to be compelled to retire before a patrol of 5 or 6 men, such as one most frequently meets.*

At 8.5 a.m. a dragoon brought in the first report from Sub.-Lieut. D...:

Châlons Road, 3rd July, 7.30 a.m.

*3rd Peloton Officer to Captain A... at Vitry-en-Perthois.*

Nothing to be seen on the road in the direction of Vitry-le-François. Am pushing on in the direction of Châlons.

D..., Sub.-Lieut.

Requested that bearer may not be sent back to me.

At 8.20 Sub.-Lieut. C... arrived with his detachment, and Serjeant P... in his requisitioned cart.

*Verbal Report of Sub.-Lieut. C..*

I got close to Vitry without any hindrance, not having met even a vedette on the road; but at 550 yards or so from the gates of the town, two rifle shots were fired at me from the ramparts. I put my detachment under cover and advanced to reconnoitre with two men, when I was again fired at, and the horse of one of the dragoons was wounded. I then galloped towards the south and tried to get into the town by the Vauclerc road, and by working through the houses of the suburbs I got to within about 200 yards of it and saw a sentry on the rampart. Not one inhabitant did I meet in the outskirts whom I could seize. They all appeared to have taken refuge in the town. I conclude that the town is occupied by infantry, but could not discover anything else.

*Verbal Report of Serjeant P...*

I got into Vitry without trouble. At the entrance to the town I saw two national guards in civil clothes keeping guard on the rampart. I increased my pace, and drove through the whole town, having warned my companion that I would shoot him if he made the slightest sign. I did not meet a single soldier anywhere else in

the city except in the square, where there was a post of some 20 national guards, who allowed me to pass without saying a word. I did not see any regular soldiers anywhere.

The captain then wrote the following despatch :—

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 4.

Vitry-en-Perthois, 3rd July, 8.30 a.m.

*To the General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on road from Thieblemont to Saint-Dizier.*

Yesterday evening there were at Vitry-le-François

(1). Some infantry of the enemy, probably the battalion 112th which I have followed from Ancerville;

(2). Some cavalry, probably a peloton 20th Hussars. They covered themselves with military precautions.

This morning the town contains only some national guards, who fired upon me and wounded a horse. Everything leads to the belief that the detachment which occupied the place yesterday evening left this morning in the direction of Châlons. I shall follow it up.

I consider Serjeant L... well worthy of the proposal for the medal.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

On the address was written :—" Requested that the bearer hereof may be retained, as he cannot rejoin me."

He selected a one-year-volunteer and gave him the foregoing despatch with these instructions :—

" Take this despatch to the general of division, whom you will find in the direction of Saint-Dizier. You will pass through Reims-la-Bruée which we left this morning and from there work to the south until you come on to the high road. Follow the road and march eastwards until you meet the general. This will probably be about Perthois. You will not return, but stay there. Here is a sketch of your route."

He made him repeat these instructions, so as to be sure that he understood them and could follow the route on the sketch.

The wounded horse of the 2nd peloton had managed to come in, limping terribly ; its rider was in the cart with Serjeant P..., having given it to his comrade to lead in. It was evident that it could not follow any further.

The butcher's horse appeared good, although small, and the captain ordered that the saddlery of the wounded horse should be put upon it and the troop horse left behind. In order to ensure eventual indemnity for the butcher, he gave him the following certificate :

*Army of the East.*

*1st Cavalry Division.*

*1st Dragoon Brigade.*

*1st Regiment of Dragoons.*

The Municipality of Vitry-en-Perthois is required in the person of..... to furnish a horse for the service of the army.

Requisition complied with 3rd July, 1870; ..... having provided a bay horse,..... hands, aged, which he declares to be his property.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

We certainly approve of the captain demanding a horse rather than leave a dragoon behind for want of a mount, and he acted judiciously

in giving a certificate. Besides being the sole way of preventing requisitions becoming a means of personal aggrandisement, it has the effect of making the inhabitants hopeful of an indemnity, and so facilitates further requisitions. But we find fault with him in this case for having added the number of his regiment and the titles of the units it belonged to, although it may be true that this was a sort of legalisation of the signature and perhaps the only proof of its authenticity. Our reason is that in the hands of the enemy this simple document could have become a most valuable tell-tale, and this consideration ought to take precedence over all others.

Observe the request contained in Sub-Lieut. D.'s despatch (page 50) that the captain would not send the bearer back to him. This precaution should be taken whenever a messenger is sent out and we expect to have to shift our position, but cannot fix upon a place for him to rejoin us. Through neglecting this, many men lose their way or fall into the enemy's hands.

On the other hand, the captain ought to have directed the connecting post at Thiéblemont on the evening of the 2nd July to keep the messengers who might arrive from the Division.\* He would thus have economised a man for the transmission of his report No. 4, which the messenger from the Division might have taken back with him.

## II.

### Search for the Main Body of the Enemy.—Halt at Marson.—Indiscretion of a Newspaper.†

**8.30 a.m.**—There was no occasion for the squadron to delay any longer at Vitry-en-Perthois; on the contrary, it was high time to push towards Châlons if any positive news of the enemy was ever to be gained.

Now what had been effected up to the present? The squadron had been satisfied to follow in the footsteps of a small detachment which had fallen behind, and if the same mistake were persisted in the result would be that the mere presence of this battalion would prevent our cavalry reconnoitring the real front of the enemy's army.

It was therefore absolutely necessary to change one's tactics, to acquire perfect freedom for one's movements, to pass by the detachment that was in front and move boldly on Châlons.

The shortest way would have been to march on Saint-Amand by the roads which were available on the north; the squadron would thus get round the enemy's right, cross the Fion, and reach Francheville, Marson, and Longeval. But the captain was not yet free to move where he liked, as he had arranged for the 3rd peloton to join him about 9 o'clock on the Châlons high road. It was already impossible

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\*In the absence of general or special orders to the contrary, non-commissioned officers in charge of Connecting Posts should use their discretion in keeping men who might be useful for returning reports, &c.—T.S.

†See Map 2.

to arrive at the rendezvous before 9.15, and one can easily imagine the natural impatience of a peloton leader who finds no one at the rendezvous agreed upon and is afraid of being forgotten. It was therefore necessary to rally the 3rd peloton.

The captain now regretted having detached an entire peloton to search for a mere rear-guard which he no longer wished to pursue but to get round. As to the number of men detached we can understand his regret, since we have already expressed our opinion that they were too many. With regard to the necessity of reconnoitring the Châlons route at all by a few dragoons, that was quite indispensable. Indeed, at 7 a.m. it was unknown whether the enemy had quitted Vitry-le-François or not; all that was known was that at 4.45 a.m. his outposts were not yet drawn in. The reconnaissance directed on the town could not fail to clear up that point; but it would not suffice to know whether the enemy had left Vitry; it was essential to ascertain the direction he had taken.

According to the despatches seized at Saint-Dizier and Blesme, there was good ground for supposing that the enemy's force was concentrating in the neighbourhood of Châlons, and that the battalion 112th was moving towards the common rendezvous. But this information was already twenty-four hours old, and in warfare very little is sufficient to entirely change the state of affairs.

Thus, suppose for a moment that the battalion 112th were to retire, not still to the north towards Châlons, but westwards towards Sommesous, would not this indicate a sudden change in the situation?

Is it not possible that the enemy, having reunited his beaten army at Châlons, might have decided all at once to withdraw it to the Seine, so as to cover the capital without losing his communications with the Loire? And could not the battalion 112th have received during the night an order to conform to a general movement in accordance with this plan? The captain then would have committed a grave fault if he had neglected to send some men on the Châlons road, for so long as the battalion had not been positively seen on this road, the squadron might possibly have followed up a false scent. In war losses of time and errors in direction are almost irreparable.

To sum up, the dispositions made in the morning by Captain A.... will not appear faulty, if we take a general view of the case; but he certainly might have done better. He ought merely to have sent out an officer's point to follow up the battalion on the Châlons road, should have moved the main body of the squadron to Saint-Amand, and selected that village as the rallying-place for the point, to which it would have brought its information.\*

Before leaving Vitry-en-Perthois there was an important matter to settle: Ought a connecting post to be left there?

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\*When in contact with the enemy, a rallying point in rear for advanced patrols, &c., should always be selected and clearly pointed out to every one in the party, in case of their being dispersed by the enemy; this should be a spot easy to find, such as a village, cross road, or eminence. If this precaution be neglected, the party may never be got together again, valuable information may be lost, and the entire mission may fail.—TR.

It was easy to see that interesting information would be gathered in the neighbourhood of Châlons, and in any case the daily report must be sent in to the Division, if it were only to report the position to be occupied at night. According to yesterday's despatch, No. 600, the Division would have its advanced guard this evening at Thiéblemont. Now, from Châlons to Thiéblemont the distance is very long for a messenger, 40 kilometres (25 miles) as the crow flies ; but by establishing a post at Vitry the distance would only be reduced some 8 kilometres (5 miles), and if relays were to be placed at that distance they would have to be echeloned all along the route.

But, after all, the high road was not secure so long as the battalion was following it ; and it is a great mistake to place connecting posts on bye-roads, since messengers generally cannot find them and lose themselves in looking for them. We should add that the presence of a small post at Vitry-en-Perthois would be reported by the inhabitants to Vitry-le-François, and the bait of an easy capture would doubtless tempt the national guard of the town.

Again, who would pick up the post ? It was not certain that any troops of the division would pass Vitry-en-Perthois, and thus the post would run the risk of being left behind and lost.

For these reasons the captain decided to leave no one behind, and in our opinion he was quite right. The reader will judge for himself.

We have on several occasions attempted to describe the constant succession of reflections, uncertainties and resolutions, which cannot but occur in the mind of the leader of an isolated squadron. The object of these discussions is merely to draw the attention of every captain to the difficulties in the rôle which awaits him. It will, we hope, be agreed that in order to fill this rôle satisfactorily, it is not sufficient to know the letter of the Regulations ; also, that all the concrete questions which that letter raises must be revolved in the mind and considered from every point of view, and that one will improvise but badly on the ground solutions which one has never thought out beforehand.

It should be particularly noticed that already on two occasions the course of our narrative has shown the difficulty of transmitting despatches between a detached squadron and the main body of the Division.

**9.15 a.m.**—We left Captain A... at the fork-road to the north of Vitry-en-Perthois, at the moment when he decided to gain the Châlons road, in order to pick up his 3rd peloton. It was 8.40 o'clock when he marched off, but as it was fine weather and he put on the pace it was not more than 9.15 when he arrived at 208 on the Châlons road.

There he found Sub-Lieut. D... with the main body of his peloton protected by march-outposts. He reported that he had pushed a patrol well ahead on the road to look for the battalion. As he was speaking the patrol itself returned at full trot, and its chief (a corporal) made the following report :

*Verbal Report.*

I have found the battalion. It is halted on the high road 4 kilometres ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles) from here, opposite a small wood. Some twenty cavalry formed the rear guard and have thrown out vedettes on both sides of the road.

The captain opened his map and found the wood referred to at 172. There was no longer any doubt ; the enemy was certainly retiring on Châlons, and apparently this was the direction in which the main body of the army must be sought. It was therefore necessary to get under way, for this body of stragglers must be passed in order to have the fullest freedom of action for exploring round Châlons. Having congratulated the corporal on his fortunate discovery, the captain gave the signal for moving forward, directing the advanced guard to take the second cart road to the right.

**9.25 a.m.**—He had in fact adopted the idea, impracticable at Vitry-en-Perthois but perfectly feasible now, of making for Saint-Amand, so as to get ahead of the enemy by passing round his right flank. For a moment he felt uncertain whether to send a patrol to follow up the battalion, but on consideration, seeing that it was now known where the enemy was marching to and consequently impossible to lose him, he decided that it would be best not to disperse his force unnecessarily.

The march to Saint-Amand was accomplished without difficulty. On the way the captain took advantage of every walk to study his map and settle his plans clearly. To all appearances there was nothing to fear in the direction of Saint-Amand and beyond, since the peloton of Hussars, whose presence had only been approximately divined at Vitry-le-François, had now been found to be with the battalion. Besides, ordinary precautions would suffice to protect the squadron against surprise, and good care would be taken not to neglect them. So that it only remained to decide what route to take to reach Châlons. From Saint-Amand this could be done, so as to keep away from the high road, in two ways ; either by riding across country towards the north-west, or making a détour by Francheville. But a cross-country ride in these hot chalky plains is always so harrassing, and the gain in distance appeared so small, that it seemed best to take the road by Francheville.

At 10 o'clock the advanced guard reached the entrance to Saint-Amand, which it searched ; and at 10.25 the squadron had got to the exit from the village at the other side, on the Aulnay-l'Aître road.

At this hour of the day it was already very hot. The sweat poured off the horses ; the men had had nothing but a little coffee at the time of starting, and their water-bottles were nearly empty. Thus the temptation was strong to halt for a moment near the village to refresh men and horses. But while crossing the Fion stream the captain had not seen any convenient watering place ; he had only seen a small incline near the bridge, at which 3 or 4 horses abreast could have drunk but with difficulty, which would have caused much loss of time. Moreover, they had not yet got over much ground, and it was urgent to get on towards Châlons. The captain therefore continued on his

way, not without regret, and pushed his advanced guard beyond Coulvagny, which was traversed cautiously. Beyond the Rû, an affluent of the Fion, they took the road to the right to Francheville.

While on the road the captain perceived that he had made a great omission. They had in fact passed through two villages without taking the trouble to find out if there were any post-offices and therefore letters to be seized. However much this was to be regretted, they were too much pressed to go back now, and it was all the more vexing because some of the letters they might have seized would in all probability have given them some Châlons news, for between the chief town and communes only 25 kilometres ( $15\frac{1}{2}$  miles) distant the postal communication would necessarily be pretty frequent. As a matter of fact there is no post-office at Coulvagny or Saint-Amand, notwithstanding the importance of that locality. Both are served from the office at Vitry-le-François; but the captain was not aware of this, and as a matter of principle one ought never to omit satisfying one's self on such a point as this.

Let us here make a digression. Suppose that the captain had taken the precaution to search the booksellers' shops at Saint-Dizier, he would certainly have come across an Annual of the department of the Marne. Next to maps, these are the most valuable documents, for they give complete information regarding all the services of the department; they are most useful for making out requisitions, since they give the names of the principal tradespeople, statistics of the local industries, and of the agricultural resources.

The German éclaireurs of 1870 have been the object of much admiration, for they penetrated everywhere without hesitation, always went to the right place, knew the name of the mayor, collector of taxes, and lord of the manor. A very pretty tale has been invented about all this. We were told that their staffs were so learned in geography that they knew our smallest communes better than did our municipal councillors; or that their uhlans had at some previous time worked in the commune they were now overrunning; or that they had spies everywhere.

Their secret was much more simple; they knew where the sources of information were and drew direct from them. In the mairies, schools, book-shops, and offices of engineers and road-surveyors are to be found annuals, maps and administrative registers; at the notaries, tax collectors and registrars, and in the mortgage offices, are to be found lists of taxes, financial information, and valuations; and papers of all sorts at the prefectures. With such documents, a guide, and a directory, one can go anywhere and find out all one wants. But the characteristic of the Frenchman is, instead of reading and taking notes, to talk a great deal and make enquiries of the first person met; as if the latter knew everything, or his chief interest were not to deceive you.

After leaving Coulvagny the squadron travelled at the rate of one-third at the walk to two-thirds at the trot; but the precautions required for passing through the woods caused a little time to be lost.

It was now necessary to feel the ground before venturing upon it; for it was only some 12 kilometres ( $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles) from Châlons, and if the enemy's main body were halted in the neighbourhood of that town his outposts would soon be run against. On this hypothesis, the course of the Moivre, a small river which flows into the Marne, presented a natural outpost line which must be approached with prudence. The captain therefore had had the woody country which forms the northern watershed of the Moivre well searched.

**12.15 p.m.**—It was a quarter of an hour after mid-day when the column debouched from the last small wood to the south-east of Francheville. Our patrols had searched the copses in every direction without meeting a single éclaireur of the enemy; all seemed quiet and deserted in the open ground which falls towards the village. It was therefore probable that it could be entered without difficulty. But the advanced guard received the order to advance cautiously, search the houses, and take up position beyond, on the other bank of the Moivre, while the squadron waited in the hollow of a small vale 1100 yards from the village.

At the same time, in order to reconnoitre on the right flank, a patrol of 4 men was directed towards Dampierre with orders to rally by way of Francheville if it did not come across the enemy. The captain moved on to the top of the ridge so as to follow this double reconnaissance with his own eyes. He soon perceived the advanced guard which signalled that nothing had been found to excite suspicion, and shortly afterwards the patrol on the right issued quietly from Dampierre by the road which runs along the river. Satisfied with these indications, the captain whistled to the squadron to advance, and they pushed into Francheville.

They were delighted to find the Moivre there, for on the chalky and friable soil of the Champagne, under a burning sun, the column had raised such a thick dust that the men's clothes and the horses' eyes and nostrils were full of it, and their thirst was extreme. Some of the men had discovered two watering places, one near the mill and another on the left of the road. The horses were watered and the water-bottles filled under the protection of the advanced guard and some look-out men who watched in front of the village and along the Moivre.

There was a momentary disorder while passing through the village, the men scattering in the houses to get something to drink. They called upon the inhabitants to give them wine, which owing to the poverty of the village could not be supplied, and the few bottles they had got from the people were quarrelled over by the last comers.

After having shared the heat and dust with one's party, one is but too much disposed to shut one's eyes to the exigencies of thirst. But it is absolutely necessary to restrain the most pardonable longings within proper limits. If the leader does not keep a firm hand on them, all the men will let their horses go and will run where they can get a drink, will take more than they require, and will commit any sort of violence; from the gratification of a legitimate necessity they

will quickly pass on to the most detestable excesses of pillage. In this case the captain was compelled to interfere so as to nip the disorder in the bud, and he took this opportunity of warning the men that the first act of pillage would be summarily punished. We may here remark that our military penal code is quite insufficient in time of war. In most cases the authorised punishments are then illusory; and in the case of the more serious punishments prescribed by the code, the formalities and delays of procedure make them too tardy to be easily applied, or effective as deterrents from crime. Discretionary power of the chief, judgment by a court formed on the spot, and summary execution of sentence, these would be the only remedies for such a state of things. All who have seen active service agree as to the necessity of exceptional coercive powers.

The captain would gladly have allowed the men a few minutes for breakfast, but as the horses had been drinking it was necessary to keep them on the move; moreover, he was not sorry to quit the village where such a regrettable scene had occurred, and as there was not the slightest shade in the place, he considered it wiser to halt in the wood some 1600 or 1700 yards further north. He let the men know this so that they might keep something in their water bottles to drink after eating.

At 1 o'clock the squadron having moved off, closed up to the advanced guard at the exit from the wood. It there halted again; two vedettes were thrown out in the border of the wood on the right, two on the left, and two in the direction of Marson. The advanced guard was with the main body of the squadron, the rear-guard closed up to the entrance to the wood. The whole dismounted, nosebags were put on the horses, and the men began to eat what they had left of the previous day's supper.

It may be asked whether the measures of security were sufficient under the circumstances, the squadron being protected by only 3 vedette posts and the rear guard. We should reply that they were, because the country could be perfectly well seen from the edge of the wood, which is on an isolated crest; the squadron was simply halting, and not taking a position where it might enjoy repose; and lastly, the men being at their horses' heads they could jump into the saddle on the slightest alarm.

*When, owing to the configuration of the ground, perfect security can be ensured by the employment of only a few men, the vedettes should be limited to what is strictly necessary; otherwise a detachment will soon be knocked up.*

During the halt, which lasted half an hour, the officers took a snack which they carried on their saddles. The peloton leaders inspected their horses, shoeing, and fitting of saddlery. The captain employed his few moments of repose in reflecting on the situation, trying to imagine the various events which the evening might bring forth and the action he ought to take to meet them. Such a practice cannot be too highly recommended, provided only that we accustom ourselves to considering such imaginary events as what they really are, pure probabilities; that we do not imagine that nothing will happen beyond

these hypothetical cases which we have thought out, and do not allow ourselves to be disconcerted by an unlooked-for occurrence. In the field everything is surprise ; but while the prudent guard themselves against it, the careless are wrapped up in their imagined security.

Judging from the indications received up to the present moment, the captain was expecting to find an imposing concentration of troops at Châlons. The fact of the line of the Moivre not being guarded by any outpost troops at Francheville or Dampierre rendered this hypothesis less probable. But notwithstanding this, since the enemy's army certainly had taken that direction (for the despatches seized at Saint-Dizier left no doubt in that respect), it was still nearly certain that Châlons would be occupied, at any rate by a strong detachment. Such an important focus of communications would never be abandoned, and in any case, the battalion 112th ought to be there at the present moment ; so that the captain had no hope of forcing the entrance of the city.

His leading thought being to get contact with the enemy, he felt compelled to turn Châlons so as to get to the camp at Châlons, Epernay, or Vertus, according to circumstances. If he encountered the enemy's forces at the camp, well and good, the mission of the squadron would have succeeded ; but if it were requisite to search for them in the direction of Epernay or Vertus, the operation would be much more difficult ; for it would be necessary to cross the Marne, and unless they returned as far as Sogny (which would be a great loss of time), they would only have the railway bridge at Saint-Martin-sur-Pré at their disposal, and it was so near to Châlons that the garrison could oppose their passage.

The captain then decided on the following plan : to push without delay to Longeval, send out reconnaissances thence towards Moncetz, Châlons, and Courtisols, and if the last-named place were not occupied to make for it with all speed, so as eventually to strike out thence towards the camp or bridge of Saint-Martin.

He therefore caused the squadron to advance, and, as it was probable that the enemy was in the neighbourhood, recommended Lieut. B..., who commanded the advanced guard, to be especially vigilant and to thoroughly search all cover. The peloton moved out at an increased pace some 900 yards in advance, and soon its point and flank patrols were seen surrounding Marson. It was clear, and they pushed through it. On issuing from the village, the captain halted the squadron and directed the advanced guard along the Longeval road.

Thinking at first that it was not advisable to let the entire squadron advance to reconnoitre in the three directions of Moncetz, Châlons and Courtisols, he contemplated entrusting this work to the advanced guard re-inforced by a peloton, and awaiting at Marson the information they would send him.

But on second thoughts he saw that the idea was not a good one, for Longeval offered an excellent central position, whatever might be the direction to be taken ultimately ; while to remain at Marson would

be only to lose time, both as regards the march before them and the reports that were expected. It was therefore better to reach Longeville forthwith.

But before leaving Marson he wished to examine the village. He therefore took with him the sergeant-major, a non-commissioned officer, and a small escort, and went at once to the mairie. He did not consider it necessary to send for the mayor, but searched all the papers, not one of which was of interest. But he found on the wall a map of the department on the scale of  $\frac{1}{80,000}$  which he hastened to possess himself of. He also found the sheets of the map on the  $\frac{1}{40,000}$  scale, issued by the government engineers, unfortunately it did not show the contours, but it was more recent than the other. On coming out into the street he saw a group of children whom he questioned :

" Have any soldiers been here ? " — " No. "

" Are there any at Châlons ? " — " I do not know. "

" Or at Courtisols ? " — " I do not know. "

Seeing that he could not get anything out of them he spoke to a woman of the place, but she knew no more. Still he learnt that there was no post or telegraph office at Marson, the letters for the place coming from the Châlons office.

The two non-commissioned officers meantime went round the village and entered the school, cafés, and inns ; they there picked up a map of the Châlons district and three newspapers, two of Paris and one of Châlons. The latter said nothing, but in one of the Paris papers the following paragraph occurred :

#### LATEST NEWS.

PARIS, 30th June.

At the moment of going to press we learn that the Emperor is expected to arrive this evening at Reims, coming from the camp at Châlons.

And in the other :

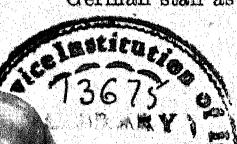
PARIS, 1st July.

According to a despatch of the *Times* correspondent, a portion of the troops at the camp of Châlons would be assembled at Reims and joined by other troops coming from the interior, and would shortly set out for an unknown destination.

True or false, these indiscretions of the journalists were deserving of attention, and the captain decided to transmit them to the general in the evening.

The press is always too gossiping, and however rigorous the steps taken by a government to ensure secrecy in time of war, something is sure to ooze out in spite of the precautions of the administration. A leader of éclaireurs should therefore never fail to seize such newspapers as may fall into his hands ; and ought indeed to search carefully for them. Together with postal letters, papers found in the mairies, and the registers of telegraphic despatches, they form one of the most valuable sources of information.

We now know that during the last days of August 1870, the indiscretion of the *Le Temps* newspaper was the means of enlightening the German staff as to the plans of the army of Châlons.



## III.

**Capture of Prisoners. First real Contact.****Cantonment at Francheville.\***

**2 p.m.**—The visit to the village of Marson had taken up about 20 minutes. It was not lost time, but the captain, nevertheless, was in a hurry to push on; he therefore trotted notwithstanding the heat, which owing to a gathering storm had become stifling, and kept up that pace for about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kilometres ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles). The advanced guard soon arrived within sight of Longeval and detached some men on the right flank to watch the border of the forest on the north. Six men and a corporal were also sent from the squadron to strengthen the look-out on this side, and the whole continued to move on, but at the walk. Suddenly the advanced guard halted, and a group of dragoons galloped from it in the direction of Moncetz, just as when a patrol marching in open country has seen something which arouses suspicion. The column halted, but after two minutes the advanced guard made signs that all was well and resumed its march. The excitement had been caused by some country people coming from the direction of Moncetz with their agricultural horses in a string; seen from a distance the point had taken them for a party of the enemy.

About 1,100 yards from Longeval, the advanced guard began to trot again, so as to surround the village rapidly without delaying the column. Too much stress cannot be laid upon the necessity for this way of proceeding, which, however, is usually neglected in garrison instruction where the ground is limited and the marches very short. It is plain that if the advanced guard amuses itself by searching woods and villages at a slow pace, and especially if it does not reconnoitre such places until it comes up to them at the pace it is marching at, the column would be obliged to halt until the reconnaissance were completed; and at that rate one might as well be on foot.

At last, about 3 o'clock, the column debouched on the further side of Longeval, and formed in a fold of the ground on the left of the road, covered by the advanced guard, which moved up to 142. The captain at once rode up to Lieut. B... and gave him the following order :

*Verbal Order to Lieut. B..., with Advanced Guard.*

Reinforce your point and leave it where it is to cover the squadron, and move with the rest of your peloton to Notre-Dame-d'Epine and Courtisols. Thoroughly search these villages, question the inhabitants, and get information. Do not lose any time and rejoin me here. Your flank will be covered by a peloton which I shall send towards Châlons. Bear in mind that you may find the enemy at Courtisols.

Returning to the squadron he gave this order to Sub-Lieut. D...:

*Verbal Order to Sub-Lieut. D..., 3rd Peloton.*

Send a patrol of a non-commissioned officer and 8 men towards Moncetz and Sarry. It will rejoin here after thoroughly searching the two villages, questioning the inhabitants, and seizing the despatches, letters, and newspapers. Take the rest of

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\* See Map 2.

your patrol nearer to Châlons, and get into the environs if you can. Try to see the enemy, find out his strength and the numbers of the regiments, and ask if there are any troops in the surrounding villages. Seize everything you can lay hands on in the way of despatches, letters, and newspapers. Trot all the way and rejoin me here.

Fortunately the non-commissioned officer N..., selected by the peloton leader, spoke the language of the country, and we shall see from his report that he knew how to take advantage of it.

Having given these orders, the captain threw out some vedettes on the roads round Longeval, so as to guard the halt, and the rear-guard closed up to the main body, leaving a few look-out men in rear. He then dismounted the squadron and waited for news.

The system constantly employed by Captain A..., when he halted for not very long periods, was to reunite the detached fractions, advanced or rear-guard, and entrust the protection of the squadron to march-vedettes only. Some of our readers may possibly consider this method vicious, but we are not of their opinion. It is necessary that the party should be warned in time of the sudden arrival of the enemy, and vedettes suffice for this purpose. We prefer the plan of keeping the pelotons united, ready to jump into the saddle and charge in a body, to the doubtful advantage of opposing to the enemy an echelon of resistance of the strength of only one peloton.\*

About 4 p.m. the three reconnoitring parties came back almost simultaneously with important information.

*Report of Serjeant N..*

(Reconnaissance towards Moncetz.)

The villages of Moncetz and Sarry are not occupied. I have learnt that a detachment of the enemy passed there about midday, on the way to Châlons. The villagers say there were about 2,000 infantry and 50 cavalry. They say at Moncetz that there is a strong force at Châlons. For some days past they have been arriving by rail from Paris and Troyes. The Intendance has bought up at Moncetz, Sarry, and neighbouring places all the corn and oats they wanted. In this cart which I seized in a farm I have two lame men whom I have taken prisoners.

The detachment reported to have passed through Moncetz was evidently no other than the battalion of the 112th. The direction and hour proved it. As to its strength, that, no doubt, had been exaggerated by the inhabitants, as happens nine times out of ten. The prisoners wore the uniform of the 150th regiment.

*Report of Lieut. B...*

(Reconnaissance of Châlons.)

There are infantry sentries between Châlons and Longeval, as well as on the Vitry-le-François road. I tried to turn their right and make a serjeant turn their left, but the chain is continuous and they were on the alert. I could see their supports.

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\*It would probably be better to keep the whole together during the halt, but in case of attack this arrangement would by no means preclude one peloton dropping back or advancing in echelon or on a flank, so as to ensure that succession of attack, direct and flank, which is undoubtedly the true method for cavalry. Thus we find in the Instructions of Frederic the Great, "ten men on the flanks and rear of the enemy do more than one hundred in front." Verdy du Vernois remarks that "in the combat of a squadron, the arrival of a fresh and compact peloton in the nick of time is of the greatest importance. Disorder is inseparable from every cavalry fight, and even numerical superiority cannot save you from it. If a compact body can come down upon the disorganized mass, it will produce a decisive effect out of all proportion to its numerical force."—TR.

This information, when compared with the assertions of the inhabitants of Moncetz, clearly denoted the presence of imposing forces at Châlons.

*Report of Sub-Lieut. D...  
(Reconnaissance towards Courtisols.)*

I was able to advance as far as the south border of Courtisols. But I had hardly got there when I saw a great number\* of horses made fast opposite the houses, and the men grooming them. Several of them catching sight of me, I went about at the gallop, and on my return, when opposite the farm, I crossed two horse soldiers who were trotting out of it towards Courtisols.

This again was very important, as it was evident that a strong body of cavalry occupied Courtisols, that it had seen our scouts, and consequently that the situation of the squadron was now critical.

But why had this body of cavalry no outposts? The matter appeared so very improbable that the captain pressed Sub-Lieut. C... to say whether he had seen no vedettes; but he replied that he had not seen one.<sup>†</sup>

On looking at the map, the captain concluded that the enemy's cavalry had come from the east and not from Vitry; this would perhaps account for its not having guarded itself towards the south and west, but it ought at least to have had outposts to the east of Courtisols.

All things considered, he did not think it possible to stay any longer at Longeval, for at any moment the enemy might come there, and if compelled to fall back in the direction of Vitry, the squadron would have failed in its mission. But why do so, we ask? Had he not received a positive order to seek contact with the enemy, and to keep it? Why then relinquish it the moment it had been obtained? Certainly the presence of a large body of cavalry was calculated to cause embarrassment. The squadron would have to guard itself strictly, expose but few men at a time, frequently shift its position, come and go, turn and hide, according to circumstances; in a word, to manœuvre. But it must not be imagined that the mission of a contact squadron is nothing but a pleasure trip. On the contrary, the experience of war teaches us that only those results are fruitful which are dearly bought; every success costs either exertion or blood.

He ought then to have remained at Longeval, not to lose sight again of the cavalry at Courtisols, to watch it, count it, find out whence it was coming and whither it was going, even if some patrols must be sacrificed to do it. Good, bad, or indifferent, the sequel will show us the consequences of retreating; but without anticipating them, criticism is justified in affirming that the captain committed a decided mistake. At the same time, before throwing stones at him, let us bear in mind that it is much more difficult to take the responsibility of a bold resolve, than to charge at the head of a squadron.

Such, moreover, is the logic of things, that having shrunk from the true solution of the difficulty, the captain was now much embarrassed

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\*Instead of "a great number" it would have been better to say *approximately* how many there were, for Sub-Lieut. D... could at any rate have formed some notion of the number he actually saw.—Tr.

<sup>†</sup>See p. 50.

as to the course to pursue. The retreat once decided upon, where ought he to retire to ? To Marson ? That would be to expose himself to the same danger as at Longevel, without having the same advantages. To Francheville, then ? Undoubtedly there would be greater security there, but contact would be lost, and if the enemy decamped at night or in the early morning it would be very difficult to recover it.

The captain hesitated. But as there was not a minute to lose, he quickly drew in his vedettes, mounted, and began to retire on Marson, without even giving himself time to interrogate the prisoners who followed in the cart, guarded by the man who had brought them.

The horses of the advanced guard had just furnished a rapid patrol, and were much blown ; the captain therefore left them as rear guard, and the 2nd peloton (previously the rear guard) formed the new advanced guard. The latter was ordered to send a strong flank patrol to the left, to examine especially the exit from the woods. The retirement was made at the trot.

The captain saw his combinations crossed by the presence of the enemy at Courtisols. Conflicting ideas still troubled his mind. Should he stop at Marson ? Or push on to Francheville at one stretch ? In a word, should he at last sacrifice prudence to boldness, or the latter to the former ?

Fresh proof that one gains nothing by turning back. One hesitation causes another, and at last one finds oneself reduced to choosing between several solutions, not one of which is free from inconvenience. We have already remarked that in such cases mixed measures, which seem to meet all the conditions, invariably dazzle the leader's eye with their deceptive attractions ; and nine times out of ten they are the worst. Here, for example, what more tempting than to leave a peloton at Marson, and retire on Francheville ? If the enemy then were to make any attempt on Marson, there would only be one peloton risked. On the other hand, this peloton would be in readiness to return the next day to Courtisols, under cover of the woods, to resume contact, while the main body of the squadron would support it at some distance.

False reasons soon multiply for setting aside the alternative solutions of the case. One is sure to magnify the dangers of the one and think less of the drawbacks of the other, and gradually we allow ourselves to slide into a middle course which leads to nothing. To this must be added motives which we care less to acknowledge, but which are after all only part of human nature, the tendency to throw the responsibility on to a subordinate. If anything happens to the peloton at Marson, it would be so easy to attribute it to the neglect of the officer commanding it ! "What could be better," we are apt to argue to ourselves, "are there not two necessities to be provided for, to keep the enemy in view and to take care of oneself?"

Now, all this is not worthy of a chief. Is the enemy likely to attack Marson ? Then let every one be there to oppose him. Will he not attack it at all ? Then all the better. But do the Divisional orders distinctly say that the enemy is not to be lost sight of ? Yes. Is it

then necessary to expose oneself to some extent in order to attain this object? Certainly. Then the best thing would have been not to leave Longevel; but since that has been done, the whole squadron should at any rate be at Marson. We should thus get out of taking such strict precautions to guard ourselves. After all, luck is a great thing in war, and the man who does not reckon a little upon it will never do anything.

**4.30 p.m.**—Captain A... , however, did not take this view of the matter. Reaching Marson at 4.30, he left Lieut. B... there with the 1st peloton, and directed the column to walk on to Francheville. He himself remained for a short time with Lieut. B... to give him instructions. "The squadron," said he, "will retire to Francheville, and the enemy will very likely feel you; so that I am giving you a responsible post. Protect yourself with great care both from the direction of Châlons, Courtisols, and Somme-Vesle. At the first alarm, warn me, and be ready to rejoin me without attempting any useless resistance. To-morrow morning you shall have orders before daybreak. Hold yourself in readiness for 4 o'clock. Get a full stock of provisions here; but do not neglect to take proper precautions to ensure good order."

He then galloped on to the column which was just arriving at the foot of a woody height half-way to Francheville. On the top, at 158, he placed a connecting post to keep up connection with the 1st peloton. "In a few minutes," said he to the corporal, "when your horses have breathed, send a man to Lieut. B... at Marson, to let him know where your post is. If you hear any firing to-night in his direction, let me know at once without waiting for his report. I will send you victuals and forage."

**5 p.m.**—A quarter of an hour later the squadron was at Francheville, and by 5 o'clock the mayor had been sent for and cantonment completed; the 2nd peloton to the north of the principal street, the 3rd to the south of it, and the 4th to the east of the church. A cow was killed and cut up, and the inhabitants were requisitioned to prepare the soup, furnishing vegetables and bread. The prisoners were guarded by the provost-post. A Cossack-post was established at Dampierre, at the junction of the Marson and Saint-Jean-sur-Moivre roads, and another west of Francheville, where the Moivre is joined by a small stream.

Nothing was learnt from the papers at the mairie; only a poor map of the district was found, which, however, was taken possession of. The mayor was required to provide forage at the rate of 5 kilos. of hay, 3 of straw, and 6 of oats per horse. The captain called together his officers and gave out the following orders:

Water in an hour, half a peloton at a time, the 4th peloton at the watering place at the mill, the two others at the one west of the village. Be ready to come for forage as soon as it is collected. The horses will be thoroughly groomed at once. Loosen the girths, unbuckle breastplates, cross stirrups, unbridle and fasten up the horses. Each man will keep his bridle and arms together in one place, so as to be ready at the first signal. Saddles will not be taken off without orders. Reveille will be at 3.15 a.m. to-morrow. Water, feed the horses with a handful of oats, and be ready to march. No trumpet sounds of any kind to be allowed.

The 2nd peloton will barricade the entrance to the village on the Marson side, the 3rd will barricade the entrances on the west, and the 4th those on the Dampierre side.

In case of attack the horses will be quickly bridled; the peloton cantoned on the side threatened will leave some men to hold the horses, the rest will run to the barricade and defend themselves there to the last with carbines. The led horses and the rest of the squadron will fall in at once at the south of the village.

The 2nd peloton, which has furnished the Cossacks-posts, will procure wheel-barrows or carts to send the victuals and forage to the posts. As the connecting post on the Marson road may want water, the 2nd peloton will send some by the same cart as the food and forage.

The captain then occupied himself with various details connected with taking up cantonments, and afterwards interrogated the prisoners.

Q. You belong to the 150th regiment?—A. Yes.

Q. Has it lost many men?—A. Yes, at least half at the battle of \_\_\_\_\_ eight days ago.

Q. Who is the general of your division?—A. I do not know.

Q. Who is the general of your brigade?—A. General R...

Q. What other regiment is in your brigade?—A. The 151st regiment, and the 40th battalion of chasseurs.

Q. Why are you not with your regiment?—A. I could not follow any further as I had bad feet.

Q. Then have you marched very far?—A. No, we came by rail as far as Vitry, four days ago; but the next day we marched, and as my boots were too tight I had to fall out.

Q. Where were you going now?—A. To Châlons.

Q. Why to Châlons?—A. To find my regiment. They told me at Vitry that I should find it again at the camp of Châlons.

The captain translated the prisoner's answers and dictated them to an officer. As the other man made similar replies, it was not necessary to take down his answers.

**6.20 p.m.**—A man from the connecting post brought a despatch from Lieut. B... as follows:

Marson, 3rd July, 6.10 p.m.

*To Captain A..., at Francheville.*

My peloton is barricaded in a shed at the exit from Marson. My vedettes are posted thus:

Right post .... 1100 yards' distance on the Somme-Vesle road.

Centre post ... At cross-road on main road to Courtisols.

Left post .... On the Longeval road at the crossing of the path which leads to Courtisols by the wood.

Have sent patrols towards Longeval and towards the woods. They have not yet returned. Nothing new at present. Am getting food prepared by people of village. Shall have plenty of forage, but water scarce and bad.

B..., Lieut.

The captain replied:

Fracheville, 3rd July, 6.45 p.m.

*To Lieut. B..., at Marson.*

I approve of your dispositions, and recommend frequent patrols during the night. Warn me on the slightest alarm, and fall back if threatened dangerously. I have placed a connecting post half-way between you and me, at the entrance to the small wood. Shall probably rejoin you about 3.45 a.m. to-morrow. In any case you will receive orders. Be ready to fall in with the column at that hour.

A...  
Captain.

The captain then drew up the daily report for the Division :

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 5.

Francheville, 3rd July, 7 p.m.

*To General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, about Thiéblemont  
or beyond, on the Saint-Dizier road.*

I am at Francheville on the Marne. During the day I have been as far as Longeville 7 kilometres (some 4½ miles) S.E. of Châlons. My patrols have obtained the following information :

1. Sub-Lieut. D... saw at Courtisols a great number of cavalry horses tied up to the houses and being groomed. He could not count them. The cavalry has no outposts round the village.

2. Lieut B... saw to the east of Châlons, on the Vitry and Marson roads, a continuous chain of infantry sentries. They were on the alert and he could not get near.

3. Serjeant N... found the villages of Moncetz and Sarry (on Vitry road) unoccupied. But they say in these villages that there are large numbers of troops at Châlons. The intendance has purchased great quantities of wheat and oats round the city.

4. The battalion of the 112th which is marching ahead of me passed through Moncetz to-day at mid-day. It ought to be at Châlons by this time.

5. Serjeant N... has picked up two lame men of the 150th regiment at Moncetz whom I send. Their interrogatory is enclosed.

6. To-morrow I shall advance towards Courtisols to keep up the contact I have gained to-day.

7. I seized two newspapers at Marson which contain despatches that seem of interest. I send originals marked Nos. 6 and 7 of my series.

I have had one horse wounded before Vitry, but have abandoned it and replaced it by a requisitioned horse. In my requisitions of to-day I have raised the meat rations to 500 grammes, and oats to 6 kilos, as both horses and men have had very hard work and require good nourishment. I hope this measure will be approved of.

I would request to be informed to what address I should send my despatches to-morrow, 4th July.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

On the envelope he added : "It is requested that the bearers hereof may be retained, as they cannot rejoin me."

It now remained to send the report and prisoners to their destination. For this purpose a corporal and three men were not too many. First of all, there was the cart which had brought the prisoners from Moncetz. The captain made one prisoner, a dragoon, the corporal, and a guide ride on this. After great trouble another cart capable of carrying four was requisitioned in the village, and on this were placed the other prisoner under charge of two dragoons, and the owner of the cart, who was to act as guide.

The captain assured himself by the map that the guides knew the road which he indicated to them, viz., by Aulnay-l'Attre, Changy, Outrepont, and thence to Thiéblemont by a new road not shown on the staff map, but drawn on that issued by the engineer department. It was necessary to avoid Vitry-le-François, as it was not safe to pass through it.

The despatches and newspapers were handed over to the corporal, and for greater certainty in case of the newspapers being lost, the captain copied out the two paragraphs they contained and gave the copy to one of the dragoons in the other cart.

They all had pieces of paper given them with the names of the villages which would be landmarks on the road, and lanterns and matches were provided for them.

The captain gave them final instructions. By good luck, among the four men told off for this duty the captain had been able to include two who spoke the language of the country fairly well. "Drive at a good pace," said he, "and put out your lanterns when you pass through villages. Take care that you follow the route given you. If necessary compel the guides to obey you. Keep close watch over your prisoners. Destroy the despatch rather than give it up. If the horses cannot travel any further, seize one on the road. At night if you go into a countryman's house carbine in hand, you will get anything you want."

The horses of the corporal and escort remained with the squadron. The carts set out at 8 o'clock.

**8 p.m.**—This way of sending despatches is certainly a very precarious one. It was especially to be regretted that the bearers would not bring back a receipt, and vexing that the despatches could not be sent in duplicate. But the captain thought he ought to be satisfied with this means for want of a better.

Meanwhile, the horses had been watered, they had been fairly well groomed, and owing to the care of the officers the forage had been got together and served out. The men's meal was ready, and they began to eat.

The officers had just sat down to dinner when a fresh despatch from the 1st peloton came in :

Marson, 3rd July, 7.45 p.m.

*To Captain A., at Francheville.*

Corporal Z., while patrolling about Longeval at 7 o'clock, met a patrol of the enemy's cavalry, with helmets (dragoons or cuirassiers), which retired towards Courtils. Another of my patrols met nothing in the direction of the woods. Everything quiet.

B., Lieut.

From these reports it was allowable to hope that we should not be disturbed during the night. The storm which had been threatening for some hours broke about this time, the rain coming down in torrents, and this increased the chances of not being interfered with. Moreover, night surprises are of less frequent occurrence in actual war than they are in old books, as the fatigue they cause is greater than the advantages they ensure, and both sides equally require repose.

The captain gave orders that the men might sleep, but they were to do so close to their horses, and without taking any of their clothing off. The horses were not to be unsaddled.

He then went round the stables and found fault with an officer whose men had left in a mass in the sacks the half-ration for the next

day. This was really a serious neglect, as if an alarm had happened there would have been no time to serve out the oats into the nose-bags—it would have been necessary to leave it behind, and the horses would have lost their morning's feed.

The position of the provost-post in front of the mairie was not marked by a lantern. This is a very important precaution, as, if it be not taken, men who bring despatches during the night do not know where to go. He pointed this out to the officer of the day, reminding him that he was responsible for this. He directed him to see that the commander of the post did not neglect to go the rounds of the stables.

These and many other similar details, which we will spare the reader, certainly appear very trifling; but the officer who neglected to attend to them would be utterly incompetent as a leader, for on the manner in which they are cared for the entire success of even the best-planned enterprise would often depend.

**9.30 p.m.**—At last, about 9.30 o'clock, the captain gave permission to his officers to turn in, but advised them not to undress and to be up at 3.15 a.m. That was a very early hour, and we should say too early were it not the inevitable result of the retirement to Francheville. Indeed, there was only one way of making up for the error that had been committed of losing contact with the enemy about Courtisols, and that was to move off betimes in the morning so as to have some chance of resuming contact if the enemy had not decamped during the night.

As to the means adopted for communicating with the Division, so far from calling it perfect we cordially invite the reader to think out a better plan, and we shall hereafter revert to the subject.

#### IV.

#### Reflections on the proceedings of the 3rd July.

Let us pause awhile to consider the conduct of the squadron on the 3rd July.

##### *1° Direction of march and transmission of despatches.*

From Reims-la-Brûlée, where he had passed the night, the captain determined to march on Châlons, pushing a reconnaissance to his left on Vitry-le-François, which was one of the objectives indicated by the general. We have mentioned the reasons which then decided him to quit the main route and take a more northerly course; viz., the necessity of turning Vitry, the desire to take the shortest road, and the fear of being stopped on the high road by the enemy's battalion. We then saw how he was led to get round the flank of the battalion so as to ensure fuller liberty of movement and to increase the sphere of his explorations. From the other events of the day there arose two main difficulties which required solution: the first, when it had to be decided where to pass the night; the second, how to ensure the transmission of despatches.

We have already said what we thought of the retirement on Francheville and the position of the 1st peloton at Marson.

As to the transmission of despatches, we repeat that it is one of the greatest difficulties to overcome in an enemy's country, at any rate for long distances ; and so much the greater because it is, so to speak, before us every moment. The slightest reflection will convince us that it is almost impracticable to lay down a chain of connecting posts between a squadron detached to a great distance and the main body of the Division. Indeed who would furnish these posts ? The Division itself ? No, for commonest prudence forbids its leaving posts unsupported beyond its outposts. Would the squadron provide them ? The same reason forbids it ; besides how could it rally its posts, as it cannot know in the morning where it will sleep at night ? It is equally impracticable for the main body of the Division to pick them up, for they are often quite out of the route. Lastly, it is easy to see that if such posts be detached at the rate of one per league, as the regulations seem to prescribe, the whole squadron would soon be used up in them.

People talk of the telegraph, but this is an illusion. In the first place, it is unfortunately very rarely the case that an officer is capable of sending a telegram by his own hand ; and if you have recourse to a regular manipulator in an enemy's country you are certain to be duped ; he will pretend to comply with your orders and will deceive you by tricks of his calling which are beyond your comprehension. Moreover the line is not always in our power. Here, for instance, it is intercepted at Vitry-le-François, and this would generally be the case. The truth is that the telegraph is an inadequate means of communication, and frequently an untrustworthy one. Again, it would be necessary to know exactly where the general is to be found at any particular time in order to send telegrams to him ; and this one is generally ignorant of.

We must then have recourse to other expedients. Sometimes cavalry orderlies as courriers (*estafettes*) will be sent direct, and these require guides, mounted guides, which adds to the difficulty. But we must bear in mind that the men of a reconnoitring squadron have already covered during the day 30, 40 or even 60 kilometres (say 19 to 37 miles) including rounds and détours. If the distance to be yet passed over be 8 or 10 leagues, as between Francheville and Thiéblemont, a good many troop horses would founder before they reached their journey's end ; but still it can be attempted.

But if there are prisoners to send back, and those prisoners foot soldiers, this method is no longer applicable and carriage becomes necessary, and it then seems but natural to make the escort travel in the cart too.

This solution of the question does not pretend to be beyond criticism, and if there be any more suitable, it would be a great service to cavalry to make them known.

We would remark that the captain did not do all that he ought to have done in such circumstances. His despatches, newspapers, prisoners, all these were evidently of the greatest importance to the general, and nothing ought to have been omitted to ensure their

reaching their destination. Even if one carriage had sufficed to carry a guide, the prisoners, and their escort, two ought to have been procured. And as there were two to hand, ought they not to have been sent by different roads, and the despatches written in duplicate? The route Francheville, Saint-Amand, Vitry-en-Perthois, Reims-la-Brûlée, Thiéblemont, was a plainly marked one. The captain did not take advantage of it, and therein was to blame.

*2<sup>o</sup> Cantonment or bivouac?*

After retiring upon Francheville the squadron was cantoned there. In the state of mind in which the captain then was, beset with the fear of a night attack, would not prudence counsel a bivouac? This is a matter for discussion.

Let us observe, in the first place, that he was careful to put a distance of nearly three leagues between the enemy and himself, and if we have found fault with this retirement we must still accept it as a point of departure for further resolutions. Now the enemy was certainly ignorant whether the squadron was isolated or supported, as he had not reconnoitred it. He had perhaps himself marched all day, and formed part of an army that had been beaten and was being pursued; all circumstances which damp to a remarkable extent the offensive spirit of troops.

One is too apt to forget that when two opposing bodies come into contact, they are generally ignorant of the force and proximity of their own supports. Each, therefore, has the same motives as his adversary for acting with circumspection. It is this very thing which saves reconnoitring in many delicate situations. On this account the captain's apprehensions appear to us to have been rather exaggerated.

But had they been better justified, the distance less, and the boldness of the enemy greater, we are personally so strongly opposed to the bivouac that we do not hesitate to say that the squadron did well to canton.

The bivouac is the cause of deadly mischief. The horses neither sleep nor eat; the nose-bags get holes in them, the forage disappears; the rain wets their backs, saddles, and blankets; the cold night air chills their organs; the pickets are drawn and the horses get loose. Kicks, cracked heels, ophthalmia, rheumatism, loss of condition, wounds, wear and tear and loss of effects, damage to the reserve provisions; such are the fatal and inevitable consequences of the bivouac, which we ourselves experienced in 1870.

A squadron may come out unscathed from twenty encounters, from twenty surprises perhaps; but it is always ruined by eight days' bivouac.

Independently of that, we have never been able to understand why a party which takes measures to protect itself is more exposed in a village than in the open.

Provided your cantonment is rationally occupied, your alarm-post well chosen, and your men trained to act in an orderly way, you will sooner be ready on the first alarm in cantonment than in bivouac. In the latter, the picket, which the horse so easily pulls up, holds too

fast when the rider wishes to get it out; the wind blows things away, and small articles are lost; all is frightful disorder. And what would be the case if it happened to be night? No light, the men run into each other, get mixed up and mix up everything, and in the midst of the uproar a horse will run away and another take to kicking. Meanwhile, the enemy, who has counted your force at a glance, 2 miles off, cuts up or fires into the crowd, as if it were a flock of sheep. We have only to call to mind the alarm of Forton's unfortunate Division on the 16th August, 1870.

In cantonments there is nothing of this sort. The enemy cannot estimate your strength, he hesitates, he is uneasy about his flanks, he can only fire on you by guess, and his small-arm fire is annulled by the walls. Have you to defend yourself? The slightest barricade at the entrance to a street, a peloton dismounted behind an over-turned cart will stop the boldest cavalry, and will even make infantry hesitate, while it will give you plenty of time to go where you please.

*Cavalry, therefore, should never deliberately enter bivouac; it will sometimes have to resign itself to it, as to rain or snow, when it cannot possibly do otherwise.* The more, too, a party is fatigued, the greater the reason for cantoning. It is much better to trot 6 or 7 miles more, reach a good night's lodging, and rest at ease, than to stay out in the open. Lastly, the increased facilities for requisitions present a further argument, and not the least important, in favour of cantonment.

This is now the third night since leaving Stainville that the horses have not been unsaddled, and the sequel will show that it will be the same to-morrow night. This is by no means without its drawbacks, for the horses cannot lie down; and although they are less inclined to lie down than other quadrupeds, it would not do to carry this on for an indefinite period. Still it is a necessary evil; for whatever pains be demanded for the preservation of the horse, an officer would certainly be to blame who sacrificed in favour of it the more imperative claims of security.

We must make up our minds one way or the other; the service of exploration uses up a considerable number of horses, and we cannot get to the end of a campaign without incorporating many fresh drafts of horse flesh. Sore backs, especially, are an almost inevitable cause of horses becoming non-effective.

But sick or sorry, the horse must carry his rider until he falls, for there are never too many sabres in the ranks. If one followed the usages of peace time, and dismounted all the men whose horses had sore backs or were done up, there would soon be no one in the saddle. We must, however, be careful not to conclude from this that no thought need be given to the horses. On the contrary, the more numerous the casualties, especially those arising from sore backs, the more earnestly must we try to diminish their number by taking the most minute precautions.

Unfortunately, the exigencies of the service do not always allow of our doing in this respect the thing we should like to do. Thus, for example, a contact squadron will generally be compelled to keep its

horses constantly saddled for many days running, notwithstanding the attendant drawbacks.

*3<sup>e</sup> Placing the Outposts.*

Some of our readers may possibly have found fault with the off-hand manner in which the captain places his outposts. Thus, when he left the 1st peloton at Marson, he was content to direct that it should protect itself in the directions of Châlons, Courtisols and Somme-Vesle, which we consider quite sufficient.

With such indications a peloton leader ought not to feel embarrassed in posting his vedettes. It is peculiarly his business to do this, and if he is not apt at the work it would be the fault of the captain for not having instructed him in peace time.\* Moreover, the lieutenant will generally do it better than the captain, for the latter has only his map, while the former judges on the actual ground. Charged on his honour with the protection of the squadron, the former is free from any other pre-occupation, while the latter has his mind distracted by a thousand other cares.

It may be objected that the captain ought personally to post the vedettes on the ground. This is not our opinion, whatever astonishment the assertion may cause. But the regulations say so ! Granted; but has the possibility of carrying it out ever been thought of ? It was all very well for the day when it was considered bold to cover oneself to a distance of 700 or 800 metres (800 or 900 yards), the extreme range of guns. It would, nowadays, take a captain a good hour to place the outposts of a squadron suitably on the ground.

One is too apt to imagine that a march on service ends at 10 a.m., like an ordinary route march, and that there is still the whole day before one. It is nothing of the sort in practice. One seldom reaches cantonment before 5 or 6 p.m., at any rate during the period when exploration is the business of the squadron.

Now, on entering cantonments, the captain has not an hour at his disposal. He has his squadron to tell off to the localities to be occupied, provisions to get together, reports to write, prisoners to interrogate, guides to procure, the mairie to visit, papers to seize, pay to distribute, defence of the village to organise, alarm post to choose, orders to receive, map to study, plans to decide upon, horses to inspect ; besides many other things of equal importance.

If he still has time, he will certainly visit his piquet, and even the vedettes, and, if necessary, he will rectify their positions. But in most cases, he will not have time to do this. He must, therefore, be able to rely as implicitly on his officers as on himself in the matter of placing the vedettes and regulating the rounds and patrols ; and further, it is by subdivision of labour and distributing the responsibility, that one can develop in the subaltern officers that most precious of all qualities, the habit of taking the initiative.

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\*In the German service the captain commanding a squadron or company is responsible for personally instructing his officers in all the details of their duties. For a good account of the German system see Kaulbar's "*Rapport sur l'Armée Allemande*," trans. by Le Marchand (1880), p. 351.—Tr.

Far be it from us to pretend that the captain is not responsible for the service of security; on the contrary, this duty is the chief honour of his position. It is distinctly his prerogative to select his posts, to define the zones to be observed, to stimulate the vigilance of his subordinates—in a word, to give such orders that the latter have only to act within their own proper spheres.

In short, the captain places his piquets, sketches out the line to be covered, the directions in which to watch, the eventual line of retreat. If two piquets are thrown out, he determines the right and left of the ground to be watched by each and the point where they join each other; he gives them all information about the enemy, and adds such instructions as circumstances call for. The peloton leaders will do the rest and report to him.

But the normal place of the squadron leader is in the midst of his cantonment and not on the line of vedettes; if he goes to any distance and any orders or reports arrive during his absence, much precious time will be lost in running after him. Each has his own task, his own post, his own responsibility.

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## 4TH JULY.

## I.

**Reconnaissances against Chalons. A double scent.**

In accordance with the orders given by the captain on the previous day, every one was up at 3.30 a.m. at Francheville, and the squadron moved off in the direction of Marson. The advanced guard was formed by the 2nd peloton, the rear guard by the 4th. A few minutes before 4 o'clock, the 1st peloton was picked up at Marson, where it was waiting, protected by march-outposts, and the captain received the following

*Verbal Report of Lieut. B...*

The patrols which I sent out before daybreak beyond the woods, have just returned. The one sent to the north reports that there are vedette posts of the enemy, one half way between the wood and Courtisols, and the other near Montplaisir farm. Nothing fresh in the direction of Somme-Vesle, and nothing occurred during the night.

We here see that the lieutenant sent out patrols on his own initiative, quite in accordance with the principles we have explained, and it was his duty to do so. The information obtained by them was only what had been expected. The captain had even anticipated the enemy's patrols coming to get a close look at his force. Being anxious to find out what course he ought to pursue, he took the road to Courtisols, making straight for the wood. Halting for a moment while his squadron filed past him, he was struck by the appearance of the horses. They had fallen off in condition so much that he could hardly recognise some of them. Their coats, still matted by the sweat of the day before, had but little shine on them ; their limbs appeared stiff, their action low, their necks stretched out, and heads too low. Four were lame, two on account of kicks, and two without any apparent cause. Such accidents cannot possibly be avoided. It was clear that the horses were not fresh ; but on the other hand, on looking closer at them, the pace was good ; there was none of that high action which is the glory of the riding school, but such as one would look for in horses which had been subjected to a severe trial, but were still vigorous, although certainly fatigued. Many horsemen find it hard to look with complaisance on this picture of the horse who has been pounding over miles of road with a heavy weight on his back ; but after some days one ceases to be too much troubled by it. Besides, this would not have been the right time to lament over it, for be the consequences what they might, it was absolutely necessary to work the horses. Still the captain resolved to make it up to his horses by giving them the fullest allowance of provender procurable.

Meantime he gave the signal for the trot, for he was afraid of the enemy decamping from Courtisols and leaving no trace of his route; but he slackened the pace on approaching the woods between Marson and Courtisols, so as to give the advanced guard time to explore the confines of the wood, and at the same time he sent out a patrol of three men on each flank to work through the clearings and rejoin at the opposite margin of the wood. But as soon as he had fairly entered the wood and the advanced guard had gained on the squadron a little, he trotted again, being anxious to get clear of it.

**4.45 a.m.**—At 4.45 he halted at the opposite edge, near 173, and directed the advanced guard to throw out two scouts on Montplaisir farm (not shown in the map), and two towards Courtisols. During this short halt, although the officers used their glasses well, they could not see any vedettes. The men of the patrol of the 1st peloton who had seen them at day-break were sent for, but could see nothing of them now. The scouts, on returning from Montplaisir farm, stated that it was perfectly clear, and that the farm people when questioned had given them to understand that the enemy had retired towards Courtisols.

The captain then thought it wise to form column of pelotons, and advanced in this formation with due precaution as far as the crest of a small ridge east of Montplaisir. The squadron marched on the side of the slope, but the captain alone rode over the top so as to examine the horizon.

**5 a.m.**—He had not to wait long. The scouts on the right came in at the gallop and reported that the outskirts of Courtisols were no longer guarded; they had got into the village, but on the other side of it they suddenly came upon the rear of a regiment of cuirassiers moving in column,\* and in a direction which they indicated by pointing to the north. They had only had time to fall back at the gallop, and could not even say if they had been seen.

While the captain's attention was thus being drawn in this direction, word was brought to him from the rear guard that three cavalry soldiers could be seen to his rear, on the wood side.

This unexpected complication pointed to the possibility of such a dangerous position for the squadron, that he was at first taken aback. He disposed of his men in such a way as to cover them more completely, and sent an order to Sub-Lieut. C... to reconnoitre these important intruders at once. But that officer had already anticipated his wishes. It was but a false alarm; the men seen were only the left patrol who had lost their way in the wood and were trying to rejoin.

So far the squadron had had no one taken prisoner. But this patrol that had lost its way, and the incident of the scouts having suddenly come upon a regiment of the enemy in Courtisols, reminded

\*At the actual moment of moving off from cantonment, &c., before the rear guard is fully formed, troops are apt to leave their rear exposed. Whether patrols, vedettes, or look-out men have been employed to guard the approaches to a body that has been halted for some time, these should still remain on the look out until the main body is fairly under way and has formed its advanced and rear guard and flankers.—Tr.

the captain that they had now entered on a phase when they were liable every moment to have men made prisoners. He therefore took advantage of the occasion to give the men a little instruction on the subject.

"In the sort of work we are now engaged in, it is quite possible for some one to be taken prisoner ; never, however, so long as his horse can keep his legs and he himself has a sword and spurs. But if this bad luck should happen to you, remember that a prisoner ought never to speak. You should never tell where you come from, or where you are going, the strength of your squadron, the number of your division, or the name of your general. Your honour and the safety of your comrades are at stake. Yesterday, for example, thanks to the replies of the prisoners you saw, I was able to send important information to the general. Do not imitate them ; but if any one asks you questions, always say that you know nothing. And do not be afraid of bad treatment ; people always take advantage of the weakness of an enemy, but respect him if he resists."

This over, the captain decided to push on ; but wishing to avoid the village for fear of some ambuscade, he inclined a little to the north-west towards the road from Courtisols to Châlons ; and as it was advisable to remain exposed to view for as short a time as possible on this open ground, he passed over it at the trot, so that in 10 minutes the squadron reached the high road.

Still the captain had pushed on without any decided object, being guided merely by a vague instinct of the situation, which impelled him forward ; the question now was, what is to be done ?

Four men had been sent out towards the village of l'Epine (properly Notre-Dame-de-l'Epine) and were just disappearing behind the first houses. The advanced guard was to the north of the road facing the la Vèle stream, the rear guard a little over 200 yards to the south, facing the village church steeple. Nothing could be seen of the column of cuirassiers just reported to be north of Courtisols ; the slight undulation, sloping down to the Vèle, limited the horizon in that direction. It seemed then to be neither reasonable nor prudent to follow in pursuit with an unexplored village (Courtisols) behind and a stream (the Vèle) on the left flank. At any rate it was better to let the cuirassiers have time to get ahead a little if the squadron wished to follow them without too much danger.

We observe here again how much easier it is for a squadron to follow the footsteps of a column of infantry than those of a mass of cavalry. When the former is in question, it is sufficient to keep the scouts out of moderate rifle range, but with the latter it is necessary to avoid committing oneself ; a squadron will soon manage to disappear at a bend in the road and to come upon your flank or rear at a gallop, when you are lost.

Judging from appearances, it was most probable that no one remained in l'Epine and Courtisols ; but still there was cause for mistrust. Moreover, another care demanded the attention of the captain. Up to the present he had only been occupied with what

there was in front of him, but there were also considerable forces on the left at Châlons ; at any rate they had been there the day before, and it was necessary to find out what had become of them.

Therefore, having given orders for ensuring the safety of the squadron at the halt, the captain issued the following instructions :

1°—*To Lieut. B...*

To take an officer's patrol to Châlons, turning the village by the north ; to watch the roads which branch out in that direction, and try to find out how the city is guarded on that side. "If the thing appears possible," he added, "try to get in. I leave that to your judgment. Be back in an hour. I shall expect you here, or at the entrance to the wood on the Marson road, if I am forced to retire."

2°—*To Sergeant F...*

To take a patrol to Châlons, approaching the city from the east ; to reconnoitre the approaches to it, and try to find out how it is guarded. [The rest as in Lieut. B.'s instructions.]

3°—*To Sub-Lieut. D...*

To cross the Vôle wherever feasible and take a patrol in the direction of the woods which can be seen beyond on the top of the slight rise (the Mont-de-Charme wood). "You must know," he added, "that a column of cuirassiers is reported to be moving from Courtisols towards that wood. Try to see it and count the force." [The rest as above.]

The patrol leaders each took three dragoons with them. When they had set out, the captain had no more officers with him to command his two pelotons ; a state of things that was much to be regretted, but which is inevitable, and of frequent occurrence.

Let us notice, *en passant*, the last item of the orders given above, as it is but too often overlooked. People send reconnoitring patrols out to great distances without telling them where they will find them in case of retreat ; as if it were not necessary to provide for that eventuality ! In consequence of this, the unfortunate men wander about ; the information they have brought is lost, and they themselves fall into the hands of the enemy. In an employment which naturally disperses the men, it is not to be wondered at if some lose their way, and are lost ; but how often is this the fault of the officer ? And we would add that it is not enough to mention the name of the place where they are to rejoin, but it must be pointed out on the ground itself, and any landmarks leading to it should be shewn to the men.

It is a general rule that a party should dismount every time it halts ; but under the circumstances, the captain thought it better not to do so, in order to be ready for any surprise.

While the patrols are executing their missions, let us put ourselves in the captain's place. Do we suppose that under the impassible mask of command, it was possible to have a perfectly tranquil mind ? After a long and difficult march, he had at last got contact with the enemy, or at any rate, everything led him to think so. His instructions now require that he should maintain it, and he finds himself alone, in an enemy's country, in the immediate neighbourhood of an adversary of whose strength, position, and forces, he has but a very vague idea. The prey is turned, but if he makes a stubborn stand, how can one avoid his attacks, without losing the trace ?

Two bodies are before the squadron leader ; one of cavalry, marching towards the north, the other of infantry, reported to be at Châlons. The latter is unapproachable in its cantonment ; therefore, to follow the former at a prudent distance, appears to be the natural course to take.

But for the present it is only known that there is a regiment of cuirassiers there. What is it doing ? Where is it going ? Is its movement connected with any general manœuvre of the army ? Or is it not rather merely part of the débris of the last battle, delayed in its retreat and rejoining the camp of Châlons ? No definite reply can be given to these questions. In following it up, there is a risk of getting on the wrong scent. Would it not be better to remain in contact with the infantry at Châlons ? If we knew exactly the strength of the latter, the answer would not be doubtful. Indeed, *the movements of a considerable mass of infantry are generally of much more importance in their indications than those of a regiment of cavalry.* The latter shifts its position for the most trifling reason : a reconnaissance to make, want of forage or water, or an escort to furnish. But infantry is only moved for a definite purpose, a concentration, a march manœuvre ; and then how agreeable and fruitful is the rôle of the reconnoîtrer ! The stragglers and baggage drivers are so many prisoners to collect, so many people to interrogate. And how easy then the pace for the horses ! Always at the walk, and only an occasional trot to get out of range. Still the kind of cavalry we have to deal with, if that be the arm we are following up, is by no means an indifferent matter. If they are cuirassiers the thing is more serious, for this arm but seldom acts like light cavalry, and when we see it anywhere the corps d'armée is not far off. This remark would appear to be so much the more conclusive in our case, since, in this campaign, the enemy had grouped his cuirassiers into special divisions, called reserve divisions, instead of distributing them among the divisions charged with the outpost duties.

Still, in the midst of all this uncertainty, the captain must make up his mind one way or the other. Everything would depend upon the report of the patrols. If the infantry remains at Châlons, nothing can be attempted in that direction ; it will not allow itself to be counted. In that case, rather than do nothing, he would follow the cuirassiers. If, on the contrary, the infantry had marched out, and the direction it had taken this morning should be known, he would act in accordance with what he could discover, conclude, or guess concerning its strength.

But these were not the only matters which engrossed his attention at that time ; since the night before last, that is, since Reims-la-Brûlée, he had had no news of the Division.

At any moment there might be important information to transmit, and it was not known where the Division was to be found. The only hope was that as its advanced guard ought to have been at Thiéblemont yesterday, there was a chance of meeting with it to-day on the road from Vitry-le-François to Châlons ; for it was very probable that Vitry, abandoned to

itself would have opened its gates. Moreover, it was not only necessary to send information to the general, but there was the equally pressing necessity of being able to receive his orders, a difficulty even greater than the former. At the present moment the general was ignorant of the position of the squadron, and even if the captain were able to find the means of letting him know it, he could not inform him where he would be when a despatch came for him. This was an additional reason for letting him know his plans, at any rate in a general way, as soon as he had decided on them.

As the enemy did not show himself, and the probabilities of an attack grew smaller and smaller the captain caused the squadron to dismount as it stood, that is, in open column. He ordered two corporals to watch the horizon while he personally gave a good look to the horses and saddlery, &c.

Five horses, which were lame, had kept up fairly well, but one of them held its foot out so as to avoid pressing on it, as if it had a sprained tendon. It was plain that it would have to be left behind during the day. The captain distributed the four led horses left by the men who had carried despatches the night before, giving them in place of four of the lame horses, but the fifth was too much crippled to follow the pace of the squadron, even if led. It was, therefore, better to send it back at once, for the further he went the more would he be embarrassed.

The captain then ordered the dragoon to gain the Vitry-le-François road, the direction of which he pointed out to him, and told him to keep along it towards the south-east until he met the troops of the Division. "I expect," he added, "that you will meet them during the day, as they were yesterday near Vitry-le-François, and they ought to have pushed on this morning. Give this note to the first officer you meet as a voucher for your situation."

*Note.*

I send to the rear No. —, Private —, whose horse cannot march further. It is requested that the first officer he may meet will be good enough to give him the necessary directions to enable him and his horse to rejoin their regiment.

A...

*Captain, Commanding Detached Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

This man was one of the most able-bodied dragoons in the squadron, and it cost a struggle to send him back, but what else could be done?

The captain advised him to avoid the first villages he would come to, lest some villager might shoot him. He did his best to console him by promising him that he should be mounted again as soon as the squadron could get another horse by capture or requisition. After pointing out the direction to be taken to get on to the high road, he added: "You will report to the officer you first meet, and to the colonel, that the squadron was at this time at Courtisols, and that we have a regiment of the enemy's cuirassiers before us."

He had thought of sending a despatch by him, but on second thoughts he decided not to do so, as the man would rejoin very late, and perhaps, not at all, liable as he was to be captured *en route*. It is only

an exceptionally good man who would be certain to rejoin his regiment in such a case, his horse knocked up and requiring often to be dragged by the head. He is apt to lose heart and think himself lost; and if he is threatened he does not make much effort to get out of difficulty. Sometimes it takes nothing more to tempt him to desert. It would, therefore, be very imprudent to entrust a despatch of any importance to a man in such circumstances.

We have attempted to describe the perplexity of the captain while waiting in expectation to the west of Courtisols; we have analyzed his reflections, and the series of inductions by which he endeavoured to clear up the uncertainties of the moment. It is only by a sustained effort of the mind that one can succeed in unravelling the difficulties of a situation, keeping clear of hesitations, and arriving at last at a firm resolve. But for this, a man must have confidence in himself, must divest himself of any exaggerated fear of not doing well, and be able to bear the load of responsibility without giving way under it.

This firmness of character is born in a man, but it can, nevertheless, be developed, and can even be acquired, to a great extent, by the force of habit and the exercise of the will.

But we must return to our narrative, in which the progress of events will gradually throw a little light on the situation.

## II.

### Closer Contact.

**6 a.m.**—We have said that about 5.15 a.m. four dragoons were sent in the direction of Notre-Dame-de-l'Epine, Courtisols, and Saint-Martin, with the object of searching those villages, the contiguous houses of which extend along the road from Châlons to Verdun. Three of these men returned and reported that they had found the first two places evacuated, but on riding on towards the east they came upon a squadron of cuirassiers about Saint-Martin. When the latter saw them they sent a peloton to pursue them, and they had great difficulty in escaping through the streets; as they had seen nothing more of their comrade, they thought he must have been captured or killed.

The captain enquired which way the squadron of cuirassiers was working. They replied repeatedly that it was on the road facing our way, that is, to the west. This information hardly coincided with the previously ascertained fact that a regiment was marching from Courtisols towards the north. What could a squadron be doing on the right of it, facing to the west? If it had had to cover the right flank of the regiment, it would have faced to the right and not to the left; if it had wanted to cover the left flank, it would have been between l'Epine and Châlons; while if it had been a rear guard it would have faced to the south (when halted).

One of two things must be the case, either these reconnoitrrers had committed an error of observation, or there was a missing link in our information which would reconcile their assertion with the previous information.

But the captain could get nothing more out of the three dragoons ; their report did not vary in the least, and their explanations and motions proved that they had not been deceived as to the direction and bearings of the locality.

The correctness of the fact had, therefore, to be admitted until the contrary were proved, unless another explanation could be afterwards found.

The captain had good grounds for not being satisfied with the first replies of the dragoons. The trooper is not to be entirely trusted in his reports. If his eyesight is excellent, his views are often narrow, his expressions confused or inexact. Still, there is a right and a wrong way of pressing him, and it is necessary to know one's man. If we go to work clumsily, we confuse him to such an extent as to make him say anything we want except what he has seen and himself wishes to say.

**6.15 a.m.**—A quarter of an hour later Sub-Lieut. D... returned and reported as follows :

He had seen, on the other side of the Véle, the tail of a column of cuirassiers, which entered the woods of Mont-de-Charme, at 5.30 o'clock. Judging from its formation it was a rearguard, about a squadron strong. It had no flankers on the left.

More uncertainty. It must have been a regiment of cuirassiers marching from Courtisols towards the north.

**6.45 a.m.**—At last, at 6.45, Lieut. B... and Serjeant F... both returned from Châlons.

*Verbal Report of Lieut. B..*

From the top of a small ridge, 2 kilometres (a mile and a quarter) north-east of Châlons, I saw a large column of infantry marching on the road in the direction of Saint-Etienne-au-Temple. The rear guard was passing opposite me at that time, 5.45 o'clock, and appeared to be about a battalion strong. A small detachment flanked the column on the right, moving on a parallel road.

"That ought to be the battalion of the 112th," said the captain ; which we already know about. But are you certain that there were other troops ?"

"Absolutely certain," replied Lieut. B... ; "because I galloped forward along the flank of the column, hidden by a fold of ground, and got ahead of the battalion forming the rear guard ; then, hiding in a small wood, I distinctly saw, at 1500 metres (1650 yards) from me, the main body of the column, which extended to a great distance, and raised a thick cloud of dust."

*Verbal Report of Serjeant F..*

I approached to about 500 metres (550 yards) from Châlons. There are now no sentries on the road, but I was fired at from the entrance into the city. I could not get any nearer.

All this corroborated the information received in the morning. On the one hand, there was a column of infantry marching towards Saint-Etienne-au-Temple, and on the other a regiment of Cuirassiers was moving towards la Cheppe ; these two movements appeared to be in unison and to be part of some general plan. It remained to guess .

what could be the meaning of the squadron of Cuirassiers at Saint-Martin, on the road to Verdun.

But this point was at once cleared up by the arrival of a countryman coming in a cart from Courtisols, who stated as follows when interrogated by the captain :

" He had seen no one in the villages of Courtisols and l'Epine; but about 5.30 he had met a large body of cuirassiers, beyond Saint-Martin, who were leaving the main road and taking the road to the left to Saint-Rémy. He had been obliged to get off the road to let them pass, and it took 10 minutes for them to go by."†

From this it was clear that there was a brigade of cuirassiers on the right, marching in two parallel columns, one regiment on la Cheppe and one on Saint-Rémy ; the squadron which had captured our dragoon must have been merely a rear-guard which, for some reason or other, was facing to the rear (to the west) for the moment.

" Gentlemen," said the captain, addressing his officers, " here is a fresh proof that it never does to let the inhabitants pass unnoticed when they happen to meet our columns. Here now is this good fellow who has just removed a load of trouble from our minds."

The captain took good care not to fall into the same error as the enemy had done. The countryman wanted to go to Châlons, but he was made to turn back and take the road to Marson. For greater certainty he was accompanied by a man who had orders not to leave him until he was safely on that road, and he was put in mortal fear by being told that if he were met again in any other direction it would be a bad job for him.

Intimidation generally succeeds with the inhabitants of an invaded country, and it is fortunate that this is the case ; otherwise how often would one be embarrassed by having to put into execution the threats addressed to them.

Among civilised nations the rules of war certainly authorise the employment of menaces, but there are some threats which could not be carried out without overstepping the rights of the conqueror.

Thanks to the information last received, the situation was sufficiently clearly defined to form the subject of a despatch. When brought to the notice of the general, and completed by reports from other quarters, the news now sent might have an important value in his eyes. In spite of the distance then, and notwithstanding the difficulty of communication, it was necessary to do all he could to send back a report, and the captain wrote at once as follows :

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.  
No. 8.*

To the west of l'Epine, 4th July, 7 a.m.

*To the General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on road from  
Vitry-le-François to Châlons.*

1<sup>o</sup>—A column of infantry is now marching from Châlons towards Suippes. At 5.45 a.m. its tail had reached a point 3 kilometres (nearly 2 miles) north-east of

† The pace at which they were moving, the number of horses abreast, and the time it took the column to pass would of course be ascertained if possible, as with these data the strength of the force could be calculated approximately.—Tz.

Châlons. Its rear guard appeared to be one battalion strong, which leads me to think that the column was at least a regiment.\* The dust is rising far away towards the north-east.

2°—About two regiments of cuirassiers have slept at Courtisols. At the present time they are marching in two parallel columns, one on la Cheppe, the other on Saint-Rémy.

3°—The outposts, which were yesterday around Châlons, are no longer there this morning. But they fired from the city on one of my non-commissioned officers, who could not get near. I do not know for certain, therefore, whether the city is still occupied.

4°—I am pushing forward towards la Cheppe, to keep in sight the two columns of Cuirassiers.

5°—I have lost one dragoon, captured by enemy's Cuirassiers at Courtisols.

6°—I shall address my despatches to the Châlons-Vitry road. It would be very advantageous if there were connecting posts there, as my horses are very much knocked up.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

**7 a.m.**—A duplicate of this despatch was made, and the captain selected as messengers a serjeant of the 3rd peloton (which had two sub-officers) and a one-year-volunteer who could read a map. The route to be followed by the serjeant was the high road from Châlons to Vitry; that for the volunteer was the road through Marson, Francheville, and la Chaussée. To both he gave the order to march in the direction of Vitry until they met the general. He made them read the map carefully before they set out, and gave each a sketch of his route. He also gave them a note requesting the persons concerned to send the men back to the head-quarters of the regiment and not to the squadron.

We must make two observations regarding this despatch. The captain did not neglect this time, as at Francheville, to send it in duplicate, but he still omitted something. Not having receipts for his despatches Nos. 5, 6 and 7,† of the previous day, he ought to have recapitulated the substance of them in this one. The despatches in the newspapers seized at Marson, and the fact of two men of the 150th regiment having been made prisoners who expected to find their corps in the camp at Châlons, these were sufficiently important items of information to be repeated on every occasion until he were certain that they had become known at their intended destination. It certainly would entail more writing to do this, and at a moment when one is naturally pressed for time, but one ought not to shrink from attending to such details. When such an important matter is in question, three precautions are better than two.

It happens every day that messengers are captured, and that owing to their want of adroitness most valuable despatches fall into the enemy's hands; as witness the unfortunate incident which occurred on the 29th August, 1870, when MacMahon's orders to General de Failly fell into the hands of the Prussians. Some people recommend

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\*The French regiment consists of 3 battalions.—Tr.

†Nos. 6 and 7 were the enclosures in No. 5.

hiding despatches in the linings of clothing, in the head-dress, and similar places; but these precautions, although good, are insufficient if the enemy searches the prisoner with care. It appears to us that an excellent way would be to give to the bearer of a hidden despatch another one, easily found on him but false, which would put the finder off making further search. In order to avoid the dangers inseparable from a false despatch, it would be sufficient if it were in a form easily recognisable by the bearer, and if some preconcerted mark were introduced in the writing of it, which would indicate its nullity beyond all chance of mistake.

### III.

#### **March to la Cheppe.**

The above despatch has acquainted us with the captain's design, and the spirit of his instructions hardly left him any other choice.

But there were two ways of carrying it out. The first, and perhaps the safest, consisted in crossing the Véle at l'Epine, and marching direct on la Cheppe in pursuit of the cuirassiers. The second was to interpose, by a cross road, between the infantry and cuirassiers, still taking la Cheppe as the objective.

The latter course was certainly a delicate one, since it exposed the squadron to be taken between the infantry and the cavalry, in other words, between the hammer and the anvil, the most dangerous position in which a party of cavalry can find itself. On the other hand, it offered the great advantage of moving on the flank of both columns, which would give the best chance of estimating their strength with exactitude; and this consideration determined the captain to adopt it.

He communicated his resolution to his officers, carefully pointing out to them at the same time, that it would necessitate their manœuvring with the greatest circumspection, and avoiding, above everything, being cut off from the Véle. "Consequently," said he, "we must be careful to expose only weak patrols to the enemy, keeping our supports at a good distance, so as not to draw upon ourselves a general attack. The patrols must do their best to conceal themselves, and must not forget that their sole object is to observe and not on any account to provoke the enemy to attack."

Further, he calculated on the map that at the then time, 7.5 a.m., the rear of the cuirassiers should be south of la Cheppe near 145, and that of the infantry about 1500 metres (1650 yards) south of Saint-Etienne-au-Temple. By setting off at once, he could catch up the infantry at the passage of the Noblette in about an hour. Meanwhile, the cuirassiers, who would march much more quickly, would have gained on them and would no longer threaten the right flank of the squadron. After trying to count the infantry they could then see what the situation would admit of their attempting with respect to the cuirassiers.

**7.10 a.m.**—Having taken these things into consideration, the captain gave orders for the squadron to move off. Sub-Lieut. D...,

who had crossed the Vèle in the morning, conducted the advanced guard towards the Melette farm bridge, where he had previously passed.

As far as the Noblette the march was accomplished at a pretty brisk pace and without any incident. The column had left the wood of Mont-de-Charme on its right, being covered by two lines of flankers who in this level and open plain were able to march parallel to it at the same pace without losing sight of it.

At 8 o'clock they halted for a few moments on a small isolated eminence at 145, so as to be able to scan the horizon. Nothing whatever was to be seen, which caused much surprise, for they could not be far from the enemy's infantry. The captain sent out three patrols: the first (a corporal and two men) towards the high road to Suippes; the second (Sub-Lieut. D... and four men) to reconnoitre the village of la Cheppe, which the cuirassiers must have passed, and to question the people there; the third (a corporal and two men) along the bank of the Noblette to ascertain whether the river were fordable or not. At the same time he moved the squadron at the trot between two small plantations situated about 1000 metres (1100 yards) from there on the side of the road which follows the Noblette. It was indeed of the greatest importance just now not to allow themselves to be seen, and this protecting screen came in very handy. There they learnt, on the return of the centre patrol at 8.20 a.m., that the Noblette was fordable exactly opposite the small wood, where a small path crosses it.

The advanced guard, temporarily rallied on to the main body of the squadron, received the order to make straight for the ford, and its commander was personally to gallop in advance of it as far as the small wood on the opposite bank, in the angle between the Roman road and railway, thence to observe the Suippes road and to estimate the enemy's force if his column passed.

The rear guard watched at the entrance to the wood, where the squadron was concealed. To the right and left, on the road from la Cheppe to Cuperly, vedettes guarded the flanks. The captain did not allow the squadron to dismount, as the situation was too critical.

**8.35 a.m.**—At 8.30 and 8.35 the right and left patrols brought in the following information:

*Verbal Report of Sub-Lieut. D...*

(Patrol to la Cheppe).

The village of la Cheppe is unoccupied. I thoroughly searched it. According to the inhabitants the enemy's cuirassiers passed the Noblette about 6.30 this morning, and turned off to the right to Bussy-le-Château.

*Verbal Report of the Corporal.*

(Patrol to the Suippes road).

There are some of the enemy's infantry halting in the wood; they are just moving off.

Five minutes later Lieut. B... sent a despatch as follows:

*To Captain A...*

At this moment, 8.30, the head of the infantry column is passing the cross-roads at the foot of Mont Frénet. I am waiting to note how long it takes the column to pass.

B..., Lieut.

On comparing this despatch with the verbal report of the corporal, it was clear that the head of the column reached the cross-road at the moment when the rear of it was moving at the entrance to the wood near the bank of the Noblette. The distance between these two points, measured on the map, is about 2 kilometres ( $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles). This then was the length of the column, and it obviously corresponded to the strength of a brigade of infantry\* on the march. Thus the strength and direction of march of the enemy were known.

Still, it was none the less fortunate that Lieut. B... had thought of noting the length of time the column took in passing, as his observation would serve as a check on the other calculation.

A knowledge of the time and space required for the marches of columns of all arms is indispensable for the cavalry officer.† It is often the only means at his disposal for calculating the strength of the enemy. The depth of the different tactical units, the rate of march at the several paces, the length of time it takes them to pass from point to point, these facts should be thoroughly engraved on his memory; in case of his not being able to retain them they should be entered in a pocket book.

Of course, these figures vary much according to circumstances, but the average numbers nevertheless afford sufficient data for calculating approximately the strength of a body of troops on the march. Most men would be able to say with sufficient accuracy, this is a company, a battalion, a regiment; but the great difficulty is to calculate with something like exactitude the length occupied by a column on the march. But this can be fairly well done if one has a good glass and knows how to make use of the data furnished by the map.

**9.15 a.m.**—At 9.15 Lieut. B... rejoined the squadron, and his report fully confirmed the calculations grounded on the preceding observations. The column had taken 25 minutes to march past at the cross roads. At the ordinary pace of infantry, 25 minutes nearly correspond to 2 kilometres ( $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles), and 2 kilometres represent fully the depth of a brigade in column. It was further possible that the battalion of the 112th had joined the column. But nothing had been seen of the peloton of Hussars which had accompanied it to Châlons; and although, during a retreat, the place of the cavalry would be in the rear-guard, it was to be concluded that it had got in advance of it, as Lieut. B... had not seen a single horseman at the tail of the column.

Thus an important stage had been reached in the mission assigned to the squadron. Contact had been established; the strength and direction of a column of the enemy had been ascertained, and of a column too of sufficient importance to make its movements very significant.

Now, to follow up this column appeared an easy task, and was moreover conformable to the letter of the instructions received by the

\*The French brigade consists of 2 regiments (6 battalions).—TR.

†For examples in calculating the strength of columns of British troops, see Shaw's "Elements of Modern Tactics."—TR.

squadron. But was there nothing better to be done? This was the question which the captain now proposed to himself.

The infantry being fairly on the road to Suippes, it was clear that it could always be found again. Indeed, where could it be going? It had left Châlons in the morning, and had already covered 16 kilometres (about 10 miles). On looking at the map it will be seen that within the limits of a stage it could hardly have any other objective before it but Suippes, unless it were going to bivouac in the open. But this hypothesis was all the less probable as the column had no provision train with it. Still, the captain knew that the camp of Châlons was situated in these parts, and it was quite possible that the brigade was going there. In either case, it was necessary to know if the camp were occupied, although the absence of outposts on the Noblette warranted the contrary supposition.

On the other hand, he must find out what had become of the cuirassiers, who had struck out towards Bussy-le-Château from la Cheppe. The fortunate meeting with the countryman, near l'Epine, had apprized him of the fact that another body of cavalry had taken the road to Saint-Rémy-en-Bussy. Were these two columns going to make for Somme-Suippes or Somme-Tourbe, moving parallel with the infantry brigade marching towards Suippes? This was very probable, but it would be best to make certain of it. Lastly, he must send to the general the information he had just secured.

These considerations determined the captain to send a reconnaissance towards the camp of Châlons and another towards Bussy-le-Château. Meanwhile, he would move to la Cheppe, write his report, rest his horses, and prevent the inhabitants denouncing the presence of the squadron.

He had also another reason for halting at la Cheppe, that of not increasing the distance of the squadron from the main body of the division. It was probable that the general had replied to despatches Nos. 5, 6 and 7 sent the evening before towards Thiéblemont, in which he had been informed that the squadron would march this morning to Courtisols. Indeed, it was possible that at the present moment (9.30 o'clock) he had received the despatch (No. 8) sent at 7.0 a.m. from l'Epine, in which he was informed that they were moving towards la Cheppe. If, then, the general took advantage of this information to send orders, the only chance of getting them was to wait at la Cheppe. This latter motive was of sufficient weight to turn the scale; and the wish to keep up communication with the general was certainly a justifiable one.

However independent the rôle of a detached squadron may be, and however free the initiative of its leader should be, one can easily imagine that under the present circumstances the captain would naturally be anxious regarding his isolated position.

As a general rule, the captain of a squadron which is to act for itself for several days would be informed, on his setting out, at any rate in a rough and general way, what route the Division would take. He is usually told to what place to address his despatches, by what line to

retire in case of mishap. But nothing of the sort was the case here. Captain A... knew well that for some days the objective of the Division had been Châlons, but he did not know the itinerary that would be followed. Will it have succeeded in forcing its way through Vitry-le-François, unprepared for defence [déclassée] it is true, but closed, and of which the population had shown an inclination to resist? Will it have had to turn it by way of Francheville? Already, when near Courtisols, it would have sufficed for the enemy's cuirassiers to face to the rear in order to compel the squadron to retire quickly; and the nearer one approached the camp of Châlons, the more likely was it that such a contingency would occur. Where, then, ought they to retire to if vigorously pressed by superior cavalry?

Moreover, the general situation had perhaps changed its aspect. For some days one of those rumours, without exact foundation but still persistent, such as float about in armies at the approach of decisive events, had been attributing offensive intentions to the enemy's commander-in-chief. He thought, they said, after rallying at the camp of Châlons the army which had been beaten in the Vosges, of marching to the succour of his second army hemmed in around Metz. The newspapers seized at Marson, the march of a brigade of infantry and a column of cuirassiers towards the railway of the Argonne, the absence of outposts around the camp of Châlons, all this seemed to add strength to the rumour. If it were well founded, if the general head-quarters knew it for certain, the operations would doubtless take a new turn, and perhaps the Division had already received the order to modify its march in consequence. Possibly at this very moment a despatch was coming from the general to the squadron with fresh orders.

The preceding discussion will explain the reasons which determined the captain to wait at la Cheppe instead of at once throwing himself on the track of the infantry in the direction of Suippes; viz., the certainty of being able to find the infantry again when he wished, and the necessity of exploring the camp of Châlons, determining the exact direction taken by the enemy's cuirassiers, and putting himself in communication with the general.

#### IV.

### **Reconnaissances directed on the Camp of Châlons. Decisive information.**

**9.35 a.m.**—At 9.35, from his position, 2 kilometres ( $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles) west of la Cheppe, the captain issued orders as follows:

*Verbal Order to Sub-Lieut. C...*

Take your peloton to Cuperly, Vaudenay and Bouy. Reconnoitre the railroad, and explore the plains of the camp of Châlons on your right. You must let me know if it is occupied, and if there is any movement on the railway. On your way back you will march along the Roman road, which traverses the camp, and rejoin me here at la Cheppe. If I should be compelled to fall back, you will find me to the south, either towards the Mont de Charme or l'Epine. Try to be back about 2 o'clock, and above all, avoid fighting.

The officer took down in his pocket-book the names of the villages he was to explore, and before starting, asked permission to give the horses a feed; preferring, as he said, that they should have the corn in their bellies rather than on their backs. He was quite right, as it was hardly probable that he could have time to let them feed on the way; and the distance they had already travelled over had made them long ago forget the morning feed.

*Verbal Order to Lieut. B...*

Follow the Suippes railway to the north-east with your peloton, until you get as far as the small woods which you see on the map. Throw out patrols to your left, so as to keep in view the march of the infantry brigade, which is making off by the Suippes road, and rejoin me here at la Cheppe. You will see if the camp of Châlons is occupied, and if there are any movements on the railway. If I am compelled to retire, you will find me to the south, either towards the Mont de Charme or l'Epine. Try to be back at 2 p.m., and above all, no fighting.

Lieut. B... fed with oats before starting, which suited him all the better, as it was advisable to let the infantry get a start on the Suippes road.

*Verbal Order to Sub-Lieut. D...*

Take five men from your peloton (the 4th) and push a reconnaissance on Bussy-le-Château and Saint-Rémy-en-Bussy. In those two villages, which you must approach with caution, you will find out the direction taken by the two regiments of cuirassiers which passed there this morning. Rejoin me here at la Cheppe. If I am forced to retire, you will find me to the south, either towards Mont de Charme or l'Epine.

These three reconnaissances sent out, the captain had remaining with him only two pelotons, the 3rd and 4th, and but one officer, Lieut. E.... The principle of keeping your forces together is always a true one, but it must still be reconciled with the requirements of exploration. Thus in the present case, the captain could not march with his whole squadron to Mourmelon, nor Suippes, nor Saint-Rémy, for the situation demanded exploration in three directions simultaneously. Moreover, for the north-west as well as for the north-east, a peloton was not too much to scour properly the high road and immense plains of the camp. On the side of Saint-Rémy a point of four or five men was sufficient, but its mission was too important to be entrusted to any one but an officer. These three detachments, therefore, were no stronger than was absolutely necessary.

On the other hand, there is matter for criticism in the terms of the order given to Sub-Lieut C. If the captain wished the camp of Châlons to be reconnoitred, he ought to have ordered that officer to push as far as the environs of Mourmelon, the usual centre of encampment of the troops. But if the order did not absolutely forbid his going beyond Bouy, it at least appears to recommend his not doing so. A reconnaissance so ordered would then run the risk of being incomplete, and consequently inaccurate. We will credit the captain with knowing but imperfectly the arrangement of the camp of Châlons; ignorance of this, inadmissible in the case of a French officer, is however quite excusable in a foreigner.

The maps of the French staff and those seized at the mairie of Marson gave no information on this point. All that the captain knew was that the camp was situated between the two lines of rail to Suippes and Reims respectively.

The reader is apt to lose sight of the fact that the squadron, which left Francheville in the morning, had already covered five leagues, and that the peloton on its return from Bouy will have covered eleven leagues. But the captain had not forgotten it. From this it will be understood that to his mind Bouy would be about the limit that the 2nd peloton ought not to exceed. However, there cannot be a question that if Sub-Lieut. C... were to learn in the villages that there were troops to be reconnoitred beyond Bouy, it would rest with him to use his discretion in going as far as might be necessary in order to obtain exact information. An officer who did not understand his duty in such a case would not be fit to command a peloton.

**10 a.m.**—When the detachments had set out, the captain at once marched to la Cheppe, where he arrived at 10 o'clock. He formed up his party at the southern entrance of the village, which had been previously searched by a patrol. Vedettes were placed all round at distances of 1000 to 1200 metres (1100 to 1300 yards) on the roads to Cuperly, Reims, and Bussy-le-Château, on the tracks to Piémont and Saint-Rémy, and on the one to the south in the direction of 145, and to the south-east on the prolongation of the Reims road; in all 7 posts, or 14 men. Thus not more than some 40 men were left in hand.

Lieut. E... went to the mairie, seized the papers (which, with the exception of a map of the arrondissement of Châlons, were of no importance) and brought the mayor with him. The inhabitants, on being interrogated, confirmed the fact that a column of cuirassiers had passed through the village about 6.30 a.m., and was moving towards Bussy-le-Château. The captain kept the mayor for the present with him. There is no post-office at la Cheppe, the commune being served by the Suippes office. But about 10.30 o'clock the vedette on the Piémont road stopped the postman and took him to the captain, who eased him of his letters. There was official correspondence addressed to the mayor, the *Journal Officiel* and the *Bulletin des Communes*. He read these without finding anything of interest. But a private letter contained some valuable information. A farmer at Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand writing to his brother, a farmer at la Cheppe, said that he had had his three carts and teams requisitioned to join the convoy of the army; that the same had happened to all the neighbouring farmers, and that according to reports, they were going to march next day in the direction of Grand-Pré. He also said that the village and all those round about were overrun with troops, and that they had seized their forage, grain, and cattle, for the army. The letter was dated Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand, 3rd July.

More than this could not be asked for. The movements of the infantry brigade and the brigade of cuirassiers towards Suippes and Bussy-le-Château were evidently connected with a general march of the enemy's army towards the north-east, and a portion of that army

had been here, on the 3rd July, on the line of the Suippes. Everything, including the ultimate destination of Grand-Pré, mentioned in the letter, tended to confirm this fact. It was, therefore, necessary to communicate it to the general, and the captain wrote another despatch as follows :

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 9.

La Cheppe, 4th July, 10.50 a.m.

*To the General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on the road  
from Vitry to Châlons.*

1°—Enclosed is original of an important letter seized at la Cheppe, according to which, a considerable portion of the enemy's army was here on the 3rd July, on the line of the Suippes towards Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand, preparing to march to the north-east.

2°—In front of me, to my left, a brigade of infantry is marching on Suippes. To my right, a brigade of cuirassiers marched this morning from Courtisol to la Cheppe and Saint-Rémy-en-Bussy. It appears to have continued to march on towards the north or north-east.

3°—I am at la Cheppe, and have pushed out three reconnaissances, two on the camp of Châlons (towards Bouy and towards Suippes), and one on Saint-Rémy-en-Bussy.

4°—I await their return here. In case of necessity I shall fall back to the south towards l'Epine. My horses are so fatigued that I fear I shall not be able to get beyond la Cheppe to-day.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

**10.50 a.m.**—This despatch was entrusted to an intelligent dragoon, who was told to march by l'Epine and gain the road from Châlons to Vitry, on which he was to keep until he met an officer to whom he might give the despatch for transmission to the general. As in the case of all the previous messengers, he was told not to rejoin the squadron, but to get the necessary directions for rejoining his regiment after resting his horse. The captain gave him a note to this effect and a rough sketch of his route.

The party had dismounted, and the captain ordered that the horses should be taken to the Noblette to water ten at a time, and that they should be fed in succession in each party. The men were allowed to have a snack for breakfast.

On reflecting upon the events of the day, the captain inclined to think that he could not well go beyond la Cheppe. The reconnoitring parties would hardly be back until 2 or 3 o'clock, after making rounds of from 15 to 30 kilometres ( $9\frac{1}{2}$  to  $18\frac{3}{4}$  miles). If to this be added the 20 kilometres ( $12\frac{1}{2}$  miles) travelled from Francheville to la Cheppe, it was but too evident that for at least half the squadron there had been quite enough work.

Still, if anything happened which would compel their going yet further, he could keep at la Cheppe the two pelotons now out reconnoitring, and push forward the other two, which were comparatively fresher. The infantry brigade, which left Châlons in the morning, would probably halt at Suippes, and from la Cheppe to Suippes the distance is so short (9 kilometres or  $5\frac{2}{3}$  miles) that it would be easy to overtake it next day. As to the cuirassiers, one of

two things must have happened ; either they had halted abreast of the infantry to flank it, at Somme-Suippes or Somme-Tourbe for example, or they had pushed further on.

In the first case, they were quite near enough neighbours, perhaps too near, to consult anything but prudence and the desire to rest quietly.

In the second case, they were already too far in advance, and it was no use to think of overtaking them with horses so knocked up. And to tell the truth, the captain was not very keen about doing so. Provided they found traces of their march and ulterior direction, it was enough that by a happy stroke of fortune they had got real contact with them near Courtisols.

Having thus decided to remain at la Cheppe, unless unforeseen circumstances prevented it, the captain took advantage of the presence of the mayor to enquire into the resources of the neighbourhood and to make out his requisitions.

La Cheppe contains 333 inhabitants, chiefly cultivators. The squadron could therefore canton there with ease, as country houses have plenty of shelter. But at this season of the year there is generally but very little oats remaining from the previous harvest, and the last one is not yet all thrashed ; and this was the case now. The mayor protested that in the whole village they would not find the 780 kilos., or 16 hectolitres, of oats required for the squadron, at the rate of 6 kilos. per horse.

One must not be imposed upon by such pleas. A rural population of 333 inhabitants has at least 100 or 150 horses, and it is out of the question that these animals should not have oats for many days, at the time of year when they have most work to do. Therefore, even on the eve of the harvest, which is the least favourable time for supplies, one would be certain to find 150 rations. The captain took this view, and a few threats soon got the better of the mayor's obstinacy.

What has just been said applies strictly to all agricultural countries, provided that the land is tilled by horses. In places where this is done by oxen, little or no oats can be looked for, even in important villages. One must then use one's wits to replace it by barley, wheat, rye, maize, or other cereals. But nothing is equal to oats, for all other grain heats the horse more or less, and sooner or later produces internal disorders. Still one will often have to make use of them, and for horses subject to fatigue we think it is better to give them wheat or maize than to blow them out with hay, &c.

For cavalry the most difficult are the vine-producing countries. There we find neither the shelter of cantonments, grain, nor forage. A detached squadron can certainly just manage to live, but larger bodies, especially reserve brigades, suffer much in such country ; for too much reliance should not be placed on the Intendance magazines. In spite of the most laudable intentions they are too heavy to follow a division of cavalry from day to day.

**11 a.m.**—The horses' food being provided for, the captain directed the mayor to select four of the inhabitants to get the men's meal ready

This was the plan adopted during the preceding days, and to our thinking it is the best. It relieves the men from the trouble of cooking and the necessity of unpacking their kits, so that in case of alarm there is no time lost and the men are well in hand. As the resources of the village were more than sufficient for the wants of the party, the captain did not hesitate to raise the meat ration to 500 grammes and the oats to 6 kilos., although the normal ration had been fixed at the beginning of the campaign at 350 grammes meat and 4 kilos.-50 oats. We would take the opportunity of dwelling on this important subject, insufficiency of ration. It is all very well for physiologists to settle the quantities of nitrogen or carbon which will suffice to sustain a man, but sound practice requires more liberal figures. If we compare, for instance, the amount eaten on service by an officer who has money with that taken by the trooper who is restricted to regulation allowance, we shall see that the former consumes one-and-a-half times as much as the latter. If we now compare the physical fatigues of both, we shall easily see that the one who expends most force is unfortunately the one who gets the least to make up for the loss. Again, compare the statistics of the proportions of men and officers who go into hospital during a campaign. It is no use talking of the cost, for a day in hospital costs more than a ration. Moreover, ought the health of a man who fights for his country to be put into the scale against a paltry sum of money? Lastly, all question of humanity put aside, common sense says that above everything fighting men are necessary, and that they cannot be maintained without nourishment. Double work, double ration; this is as true for the men as for the horses.

When the chance of war brings a detachment into a rich country, it lives there by requisitions, is no longer hampered by the grave question of convoys, and the local resources are far greater than what is required; why, then, should we be niggardly? Why forbid the officer to comfort his men and horses, to treat the companions of his fatigues and glories liberally? Ask the farmers of la Beauce and la Brie if the Prussian cavalry measured its requisitions by the centigramme in 1870.

Unfortunately there are armies in which a jealous administration holds other views, and would not allow an officer to exceed the regulation ration for a party knocked up by fatigue. But sound doctrines make their way sooner or later, and such baneful ideas cannot prevail long.

Still, besides actual necessity there is also such a thing as abuse; and to prevent the latter the best way would be to determine once for all, independently of the normal ration, a larger allowance which would be distributed when circumstances permitted, on the order of the officer in command, and on his responsibility. And although the word is of little consequence, it would be better not to call it an extraordinary ration, as that name would make too many men hesitate. The full ration ought to be the guiding one; the other, although more common, being after all only a makeshift, necessitated by poverty of resources and difficulty of transport.

We would here note an omission that is much to be regretted in the requisition tables at present in force by [French] regulation. Substitutes are not sufficiently provided for. For example, such and such a village or farm, where there is no beef, mutton, or salt bacon, would furnish veal, fresh pork, or fowls in sufficient quantity. And similarly as to vegetables and forage. In place of the provisions mentioned on the lists, one is often compelled to make use of such as are used in the country traversed; for one must make up one's mind to live as the people of the country do. But who knows exactly how much of such provisions should be taken as the equivalent of the rations of other things mentioned in the table? The result is that an officer told off to requisition is often much embarrassed by the fear of giving too much or too little. We should therefore like to see on the requisition tables a complete list of all the provisions which might be requisitioned, with the quantity thereof corresponding to an ordinary and large ration.

We left Captain A... with two pelotons, protected by march outposts, at the south entrance of la Cheppe, while his reconnaissances are scouring the country about the camp of Châlons and Saint-Rémy-en-Bussy. It was then 11 o'clock: the horses were beginning to be watered and fed by groups; the men were breakfasting, their bridles over their arms; the mayor was busy carrying out the requisition for food and forage for the evening meal.

Having decided to remain at la Cheppe, unless prevented by circumstances, the captain ordered the quartermaster-non-commissioned officers [fourriers] to go round the village and arrange the cantonment. Just at present, the day was so little advanced, that one could not think of entering cantonment; as long as the reconnoitring parties were still out, it was necessary to remain on the *qui vive*, ready to spring to the saddle at the first alarm.

The temporary outposts, as we have remarked, took up 14 men for the vedette posts. It appears as if a great many men were here employed to protect a force of only two pelotons, although the vedettes had no supports in rear of them. On examining the map, the captain hoped to find a way of reducing the number without compromising the safety of the party, but the ground did not lend itself to this. The position at la Cheppe was completely *en l'air*; all directions, except perhaps that of the south-east, appeared equally dangerous and called for thorough surveillance.

We should here remark that *the fact of reconnaissances having been sent to great distances by no means dispenses with the necessity of covering the directions they have taken by vedettes*. Their real business is to discover the enemy, and not to cover the force they belong to. The independence of their march, their distance, and the great intervals between them, render them liable to be turned every moment. A party which counted on them would, therefore, be trusting to a false security. It is different with patrols. These cover a position very effectually; but although their employment often permits of reducing the number of men employed in the service of security, we do not

consider that the present was a suitable case for having recourse to them. Firstly, because their employment is much more fatiguing than that of vedettes, especially for a party already hard worked. Next, because in case of an alarm vedettes are fairly easily rallied, while one is obliged to abandon patrols on account of not knowing where to find them at the moment we wish to call them in. If you have unexpectedly to retire, your patrols do not know where to rejoin you and are liable to fall into the enemy's hands. So in the present case, either on the side of the camp of Châlons or towards Saint-Rémy, our reconnaissances might run against a force which would pursue them closely and drive them back rapidly to la Cheppe, which would necessitate a rapid retreat towards the Mont de Charme; while any patrols on the side where the attack was made would not be warned in time and would almost certainly be captured. Thus the employment of patrols requires a certain fixedness of position; at any rate they must be certain of finding behind them supports which can receive them. Otherwise the system of vedettes must be preferred in spite of its drawbacks.

The difficulty Captain A... felt in covering the village of la Cheppe suitably was by no means exceptional. It always occurs when a position has to be guarded from which numerous and equally threatened roads radiate. But it is increased when the dangerous ground is divided, as in this case, by a stream of water or other obstacle into two zones not in easy communication with each other.

**12 noon.**—It was a little past mid-day when the posting of the vedettes was finished. Nothing then remained but to wait for the arrival of reports of any discoveries that might be made. Until that took place it would have been very imprudent to put the party into buildings.

The patrol of Sub-Lieut. D... was not long in coming back, and its commander reported to the following effect:

I have been to Bussy-le-Château and Saint-Rémy. I have not met any of the enemy, but the inhabitants told me that a strong column of cuirassiers had passed through Saint-Rémy this morning about 6.30 o'clock, making for Somme-Tourbe. I also learnt that a similar column passed through Bussy-le-Château at the same hour, coming from la Cheppe and moving towards Suippes.

This report, then, confirmed what had been previously concluded regarding the march of the cuirassiers.

The captain directed the party to remain quiet with bridles over their arms, as on piquet duty. Sentries, also dismounted, holding their horses, were placed at all the issues from the village, with orders to let no one whatever pass out. This measure was rather late in the day. It ought to have been taken immediately on arrival at la Cheppe, that is, at about ten o'clock; but at last the fault was repaired, and, owing to the captain's good fortune, no harm resulted from the delay.

Two hours passed in this way without any further incident, during which the men adjusted their saddlery and kit, rubbed down the horses' legs and rested themselves in the shade of the first houses of the village. The captain was waiting for news from the camp of

Châlons, and looking impatiently forward to the instructions he expected from the Division.

**2 p.m.**—About 2 o'clock the 1st peloton returned to la Cheppe, and its commander, Lieut. B..., reported as follows :

*Verbal Report of Lieut. B...*

I kept alongside the Suippes Railway with my peloton, and sent out a patrol to my left with orders to get near the village of Suippes, and find the infantry column, reported to be in that direction. On nearing some clusters of woods along the railway, my advanced guard reported two squadrons of cuirassiers in line facing south about the knolls at 160 and 165. One of their vedettes, who was on the railway, fell back rapidly. I retired behind the high ground at Piémont, leaving two dragoons to observe. I was joined about midday by my left patrol, which had advanced quite close to Suippes. It reported that a sentry post guarded the road, 2000 metres (2200 yards) south of the village. At the farm of Piémont we saw the remains of a straw stack just burnt; the fact of the ground being much trodden and the existence of numerous dung and rubbish heaps show that there has been a recent bivouac. At the present time the farm is empty. The infantry has outposts south of Suippes, the cuirassiers are in position on the road from Bussy-le-Château to Suippes; the camp of Châlons appears to be abandoned, but shows signs of having lately been occupied.

It was easy to gather from this report that the enemy's infantry had reached Suippes and had thrown out outposts; that troops had halted at the farm of Piémont, and that the camp was evacuated, at any rate on its eastern side. As to the two squadrons of cuirassiers drawn up at 160, they were evidently detached from the regiment which had passed through Bussy-le-Château at 6.30. Did they form part of an extensive system of outposts, or were they only a rear-guard intended to watch the south? Whichever it might be, their presence in that place could not but be annoying. The captain even asked himself if it would not be well to retire towards Mont de Charme to get under cover; but he abandoned this idea: first, because it would necessitate his retreating before having rallied the 2nd peloton, which was still reconnoitring towards Bouy; and secondly, because in abandoning la Cheppe he would give the inhabitants an opportunity to inform the enemy of his arrival. On mature reflection he concluded that if these cuirassiers formed the intention of disturbing him, the vedettes would suffice to discover their approach, and there would be plenty of time to get out of their reach.

Still the captain found fault with Lieut. B... for not having reported the presence of the squadrons until his return. As soon as they were discovered by his advanced guard, he ought to have detached a man to warn him.\*

As it was time to relieve the posts, the captain took care to let the relieving vedettes know what he had just learnt, and enjoined them to be particularly vigilant. He would have liked to send a patrol in the direction of the cuirassiers, but as he had only some twenty rested horses in hand he gave up the idea. This was wrong, in our opinion, as two men would have sufficed to increase the general security by getting in contact with the cuirassiers.

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\* Although horses must be spared as much as possible, still this consideration must not prevent really important information being sent back at once.—Tr.

**2.20 p.m.**—A few minutes later the 2nd peloton returned with not less interesting information.

*Verbal Report of Sub-Lieut. C...*

The villages of Cuperly, Vaudenay, and Bouy are unoccupied, but they have lately been occupied by considerable masses. The inhabitants assert that there were 200,000 men. I have brought this countryman, whom I met at Bouy returning in a cart from Mourmelon-le-Grand. He tells me that there is now not one soldier in the village, and that the Emperor left it on the 30th June. The last of the troops must have evacuated the camp of Châlons on the same day and moved on Reims. I came back by Bouy farm and the Chaussée de Reims without finding anything but the remains of numerous abandoned bivouacs. To the north of that road, about 10 kilometres ( $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles) from here, I saw some tents still standing but empty, and all around considerable débris of burnt articles, remains of sacks, biscuit chests, and stacks of forage burnt. On one side was a line of earthworks, redans and curtains, all abandoned.

The captain interrogated the countryman brought by Sub-Lieut. C... His replies agreed in every respect with the above report. As he had a good cart and well horsed, which might be useful, and it was perhaps risky to let him go after all he had seen, the captain kept him for the time with him.

The general situation was becoming clearer and clearer. The camp of Châlons had been evacuated since the 30th June, the troops had retired at first on Reims, and yesterday, 3rd July, considerable forces were on the Suippes. The reports of the reconnoitring parties, the talk of the inhabitants, the despatches in the newspapers, the letter of the farmer at St. Hilaire, the march of the infantry and cuirassiers, all the indications gathered for three days past agreed in proving these facts.

Of course the captain was not charged with the task of discovering the strategic reason of the movements, but he could at any rate foresee that a knowledge of these facts would be of the highest service to the head-quarter staff. He might therefore congratulate himself on the results of his search for information.

But a serious uncertainty marred the satisfaction he might well feel. Had the reports sent by him to the Division reached their destination? This it was impossible to affirm positively, whatever care might have been taken in the transmission of them, for he was absolutely without any news of the Division, and it was very easy to imagine difficulties which might have hindered their passage.

Moreover, the captain could not consider his mission as complete until he received orders to rejoin his regiment. His instructions were to keep in constant contact with the enemy. After this one might be sure of finding considerable forces but a short distance off; if, then, it were more feasible to carry out the general's desire, on the other hand the task appeared to be much more delicate for the squadron. Indeed, besides the necessity there was to avoid committing the squadron, the fatigue of the horses had now to be taken into account. A staff scarcely hesitates to sacrifice a squadron in order to get information; but a captain is bound to be anxious about the squadron he commands; and, from his particular point of view, however resigned

he may be to devote himself to the interests of the army, it is very excusable if he wishes at least to cover his personal responsibility for the preservation of the horses by formal orders.

On this account the captain had a very strong desire to renew his communications with the Division, and as it was necessary to transmit the latest information, he at once wrote the following despatch :

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 10.

La Cheppe, 4th July, 2.30 p.m.

1°—The infantry brigade, which left Châlons this morning, is now at Suippes, where it has thrown out outposts.

2°—The cuirassier brigade, which left Courtisols this morning, has taken the direction of Somme-Suippes in two parallel columns. It has left behind two squadrons which are at present half-way between Suippes and Bussy-le-Château, facing south with vedettes.

3°—My reconnoitring parties have just scoured the camp of Châlons as far as Suippes on one side and Bouy on the other. They met no troops of the enemy, but found everywhere traces of recent bivouacs, some tents still standing, and considerable débris of burnt provisions. A countryman, of Grand-Mourmelon, declares that the whole camp is abandoned, and that the last troops and the Emperor himself quitted it on the 30th June for Reims.

4°—Have you received the newspapers which I seized yesterday at Marson, and at once sent to you? They contained two despatches as follows:

PARIS, 30th June.

"The Emperor is expected in the evening at Reims from the camp of Châlons."

PARIS, 1st July.

"According to a despatch of the *Times*, a portion of the troops at the camp of Châlons would be incorporated at Reims with other troops coming from Paris, and would soon set out thence for an unknown destination."

5°—I also sent you a letter written by a farmer at Saint-Hilaire-le-Grand, which I seized this morning. The substance of it is as follows:—There was a strong concentration of troops yesterday, 3rd July, on the Suippes; the Intendance of the enemy has requisitioned all over the country a very great quantity of provisions and considerable transport; and these latter were expected to march to-day, 4th July, in the direction of Vouziers. It also appears from the letter referred to, that the writer had himself been requisitioned with his teams, and that he is, therefore, an eye-witness.

6°—My horses are knocked up, not having been unsaddled for four days. The work to-day has been so heavy that I am not able to get beyond la Cheppe to-night, unless any unexpected necessity compels me.

7°—I shall maintain contact, but I anxiously await orders, particularly as to the means by which to send my despatches. I do not know where the Division is. It would be of great service if you could consider how to keep me in connection with it, as I am very uneasy at not knowing what becomes of the despatches I send.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

And on the envelope :

*To the General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division, on the road from Vitry-le-François to Châlons.*

*Pace : Quick.*

The despatch was entrusted to a corporal, who received all necessary instructions for the journey. He was ordered to hand it over to the first officer of the Division whom he might meet, and to request him

to transmit it to its destination ; he was also to remain with this officer, who would look after his subsistence until he could rejoin his regiment. The captain gave him a note to that effect.

While waiting at la Cheppe for the return of his reconnoitring parties, the captain had utilised the time for getting in his provisions. The reader will remember that immediately on his arrival he sent for the mayor and ordered him to have the meal for men and horses got ready ; and he had satisfied himself through his serjeant-major that the requisition would be punctually executed. This was an additional reason for passing the night at la Cheppe, and he was too anxious to receive orders to run the risk of increasing the distance between himself and the Division by leaving his present position.

## V.

### Re-establishment of Communications.

**3.30 p.m.**—Meanwhile about 3.30 o'clock, three horsemen appeared to the south, whose arrival furnished the reply to what was uppermost in the captain's mind. These were Captain R..., of the Divisional Staff, followed by a dragoon, who was the very man the captain had sent that morning from l'Epine to take his despatch No. 8 to the general. He had been mounted on a fresh horse and had guided Captain R... as far as l'Epine. For greater certainty, Captain R..., before arriving at that village, had requisitioned at Monplaisir farm a young countryman mounted on a farm horse, and he had acted as guide to la Cheppe.

Such precautions are worth noticing, for the worst guide is often worth more than the best map.

The staff captain brought the following despatch :—

#### *Staff*

#### *1st Cavalry Division.*

No. 870. Oney (road from Vitry-le-François to Châlons), 4th July, 10 a.m.

Received from 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons :

1°—Despatch No. 4, dated from Vitry-en-Perthois.

2°—Despatch No. 5, from Francheville.

3°—Two copies of newspapers seized by the Squadron and forwarded as Nos. 6 and 7.

4°—Two prisoners of the 150th regiment of infantry.

5°—Despatch No. 8, from l'Epine.

Sent to the same Squadron :

1°—Despatch No. 853, dated from Thiéblemont.

2°—Despatch No. 857, from Outrepont.

Both the above addressed to between Francheville and Courtisols.

The Squadron is requested to state if these have been received.

The 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons, is not itself to proceed further than la Cheppe until further orders, but will continue to throw out patrols in all directions, especially towards the camp of Châlons and the Suippe river, to obtain information there and preserve contact.

The headquarters of the Division is at Oney. Staff-Captain R... is instructed to acquaint Captain A... with the general situation and communicate to him verbally the instructions of the general.

By order, Z..., Chief of Staff.

As soon as Captain A... had read this, Captain R... addressed him thus : " I am directed," said he, " to acquaint you with the situation, so that you may be in a position to regulate your further proceedings." He opened his map and continued " To-day the Division occupies all the villages on the course of the Moivre with the Dragoon and Cuirassier brigades. On the right the Hussar brigade is reconnoitring about the sources of the Yèvre and Ante, by Somme-Yèvre and Givry-en-Argonne. This brigade is, to a certain extent, acting independently. Our grand'gardes are at Chépy, Marson, the knot of roads north of Saint-Jean-sur-Moivre, and Poix : they radiate from there into the zone comprised between the Marne and the chaussée romaine of Bar-le-Duc at Reims.

According to the instructions of general head-quarters, it is possible that after to-morrow we may have to abandon our march on Châlons to move rapidly towards the north or north-east ; but until further orders the Division will halt in its present positions, throw out patrols in every direction, and gain all information possible.

The head-quarters of the Division is at Omey ; if it is moved you will be informed. You must therefore address your despatches to Omey, and to this end you will send them to Poix, where they will be received and transmitted by the outposts of the dragoons.

I have been ordered to consider with you the question whether you could not establish connecting posts between la Cheppe and Poix, for example at the cross-roads of the Paris and Reims roads ; for under the present circumstances it is essential that the transmission of despatches should be effected with the utmost rapidity. Please give me your opinion on this point."

" I could not wish for more," replied Captain A... , " as the thing I desire above everything is to re-establish my communications ; but there are two reasons why I cannot do that. The first is, that my horses are knocked up and almost incapable of keeping up any service of correspondence. The second is the presence of very superior cavalry at Suippes. Two of the enemy's squadrons are now only half-way from here, about 165. If they take it into their heads to dislodge me I do not know in which direction to retire, for that will depend on the direction and form of the attack. Consequently, I fear that I might not be able to rally my connecting posts, and should have to leave them to be captured. I should much prefer that the dragoons who occupy Poix should throw out a detachment to the cross-roads you mention ; this would cover my rear, and at the same time ensure the service of correspondence being efficiently carried out."

" Such an arrangement would certainly be very advantageous for you," replied Captain R... , " but I am not sure that the dragoon brigade would willingly undertake it."

" But observe that it would be as advantageous for the brigade as for me ; for a detachment placed at the cross-roads, at the place called la Romanie, would very effectually cover the right wing of the brigade, and it might have an opportunity of getting some important information. If it is true that the enemy has moved to-day from the

Suippes to the Aisne, as I have reason to believe, it would not be surprising if couriers were to pass along the road from Châlons to Verdun, and the detachment would capture them."

"What you say appears very reasonable," replied Captain R..., "and I quite agree with you that you would have great difficulty in leaving men behind you. When I leave you I shall return by Poix, and there I shall suggest to the commander of the outposts to send a small detachment to la Romanie. I think a dozen men under a non-commissioned officer would be sufficient."

"That is my opinion also," returned Captain A.... "On my part I will send a post of 4 men half-way between la Cheppe and la Romanie, and in that way the service of correspondence will be thoroughly ensured."

We should add that Staff-Captain R... was aware that the character of his mission did not authorise his proposing this arrangement to the commander of the outposts at Poix. Indeed, the general of division had expressly charged him to arrange with Captain A... for organising some connecting posts between the detached squadron and the main body of the Division. But the conversation just recorded having convinced him that the solution of the question proposed by Captain A... was the most appropriate, he did not hesitate to assume the responsibility of having it carried out by the officer who commanded at Poix, the latter reporting the action he had taken to his immediate chief. There is nothing new in this view of the duties and prerogative of a staff officer. He certainly will render greater service to his country by acting in such a way than by expending his zeal in making copies of letters. But we must observe how important it is that officers selected for such missions as Captain R... was employed upon should be thoroughly versed in the details of field service, and should have learnt by practical experience how to arrive at just and prompt solutions.

The two captains then talked over the latest events. Captain A... thus learnt that the Cavalry Division had not met the enemy anywhere between Francheville and Omey. At Vitry some local militia had attempted to defend the entrance to the place, but their feeble resistance had yielded to a few rounds of artillery. On the left bank of the Marne another Cavalry Division had similarly ranged the country as far as the Aube without meeting with anything. At the present time the wings of the two Divisions were in contact in line with Omey. Thus it became certain that the enemy had concentrated his forces in Champagne; the last despatches of the general staff led one to suppose that instead of disputing the road to Paris, the enemy's army would be re-organised at Châlons only to move up thence in a north-easterly direction; and the information already gained by the squadron tended to confirm this hypothesis.

But the head-quarter staff was determined to ascertain this beyond all doubt before adopting any decided plan.

"In consequence of this," added Captain R..., "you are specially required to keep your patrols in contact with the enemy and to watch

his movements, without, however, taking the main body of your squadron beyond la Cheppe, as you must hold yourself ready to receive fresh orders."

Captain A... then communicated to Captain R... the events of the morning, the presence of an infantry brigade at Suippes, and of a cuirassier brigade about Somme-Suippes.

"My reconnoitring parties," said he, "saw that the camp of Châlons is abandoned, and found there the *débris* of huts and provisions recently burnt. A countryman from Mourmelon-le-Grand states that the troops and the Emperor quitted the camp on the 30th of June, and retired upon Reims. Since then it seems to me that considerable forces have moved on the Suippes. I have reported these facts in my last despatch which left here an hour ago. I addressed it to the general on the road from Vitry to Châlons, not knowing at the time where headquarters were. You ought to have met the corporal who is taking it on your road. But in case he loses his way, please take a note of this information so as to communicate it to the general. I now regret not having sent my despatch by several routes at once, but my horses are so knocked up! In any case your statement would be accepted as a true report."

Notice how well deserved was the criticism which Captain A... addressed to himself. No amount of fatigue nor any argument whatever could be accepted as justifying the neglect: *Every important despatch ought to be sent in duplicate or triplicate, and by separate routes.* The greater the distances, the more uncertain will be the arrival of the messengers, and the greater the necessity for taking more numerous precautions. If ever there were such an urgent case, surely this was it.

"In compliance with the instructions you have brought me," continued Captain A..., "I shall pass the night at la Cheppe, and shall not leave the village until I get fresh orders. Meantime I shall keep up incessant patrols in the directions of Reims and Suippes, and shall let the Division know everything that occurs on my side."

**4.30 p.m.**—This conversation had lasted an hour, so that it was 4.30 when Captain R... decided to set out, having given a little oats to his horse and himself had some refreshment. He left with the squadron the dragoon he had brought back, and also the guide he had requisitioned at the farm of Monplaisir.

It had been agreed that Captain A... should place a connecting post in the evening between la Cheppe and la Romanie, that Captain R... should try to persuade the commander of the outposts at Poix to post a dozen men at la Romanie, and that these should, as soon as in position, put themselves in communication with the post of the 1st Squadron. Taking the distances into account, it might be expected that the communication would be established in this way by 8 or 8.30 p.m. Things being thus arranged, Captain R... wished his comrade good luck and set out by the Roman road of Bar-le-Duc.

**4.30 p.m.**—This visit of Captain R.'s came in the very nick of time to put Captain A... at his ease. The squadron leader now knew

exactly the things which it was important for him to know: the position of Divisional head-quarters, the opinion of the staff as to the general situation, the arrival at their destination of the items of information which he had already sent in, the direction to be given to his further reconnaissances, and the mode in which to transmit his despatches.

He had now only to fix upon his dispositions for the night, taking care that they conformed with the spirit of the general indications given by the staff.

He began by ordering that half the men present should have their evening meal at once; next the other half of those present, and lastly the detached men on outpost duty, who were to be relieved for the purpose.

Thanks to the zeal of the mayor, or rather to his anxiety to spare the commune any unpleasantness, everything was ready; provisions, places, and utensils.

From the men who had finished their meal first the captain selected four, including a corporal, to reconnoitre the enemy's cavalry in the direction of Suippes, about the hills at 160 and 165. He ordered them to look for the squadrons which had been reported at those points. If they did not meet them, they were to go towards Suippes and not to return until they had reconnoitred the outskirts of the place. If they met the enemy, they were to observe them closely, send in news and not return till morning.

**5 p.m.**—The patrol, having fed their horses, set out at 6 o'clock. As the night was to be passed at la Cheppe, it was necessary now to take the requisite measures for security. It is well to observe that the position of la Cheppe was quite *en l'air*, and that the village formed the meeting point of seven or eight roads, of which only one (that which goes in the direction of Somme-Vesle) was not threatened. It will also be remembered that Captain A... had undertaken to furnish a post to connect himself with Poix, which would reduce the number of men at his disposal, and that the powers of both horses and men were greatly exhausted, that is to say, had nearly come to the very end. It was, therefore, necessary to secure themselves most thoroughly, but at the same time, with the very least expenditure of men.

The captain, therefore, considered that the following dispositions would meet the case. The main body of the squadron would canton as close together as possible in the part of the village on the left bank of the Noblette. Cossack-posts would guard the principal roads which radiate towards the enemy: namely, the road of Saint-Etienne-au-Temple, the Chaussee of Cuperly, that of Reims, and the road to Somme-Suippes by Bussy-le-Chateau; in all, four posts or 16 men. A whole peloton was to act as piquet at the entrance to the village, on the right bank of the Noblette, and would keep up constant patrols of two men each on the intermediate and less important roads. Lastly, the entrances to the village would be barricaded, as also the bridge over the Noblette; the sentries would prevent any inhabitant going in or out; and at the first alarm, men, told off beforehand,

would occupy the barricades and defend them with their carbines until the squadron was mounted and ready to retire.

**8 p.m.**—These dispositions were made without delay. At 8 o'clock the arrangements were completed and in working order. The connecting-post sent to la Romanie reported\* a little later that it was in communication with the similar post established by the dragoons detached from Poix.

Nothing now remained but to get the most repose they could in anticipation of the events of the next day. The officers, who had superintended the quartering of their pelotons, came in with their reports. Unfortunately, they were not very favourable. Many of the horses were not under shelter; others were too closely packed; a good many were off their feed, and some put their feet down on the ground as if sprained; while all showed evident signs of extreme fatigue. The officers wished to give them some ease by unsaddling for the night; but the captain would not accede to their request, on the grounds that circumstances would not admit of their being guilty of the slightest imprudence, and that this would be but of slight benefit to horses which only a rest of several days could set on their legs again; he observed that they would get this rest shortly, and that if the exigencies of the service required it, one ought not to hesitate to sacrifice the horses in order to accomplish the task with which the squadron had been honoured.

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\*If the ground admitted of it, this information might, in such a case, be flashed by a dark lantern, to save horse flesh. Here is one of the cases in which cavalry signalling is practicable and of *real* use.—TR.

## 5TH JULY.

## I.

**Waiting at la Cheppe. Patrols at Suippes and Somme-Tourbe.**

The night was passed without any alarm. On the 5th the captain was on the alert at dawn. He directed one of his officers to mount and take a patrol towards Somme-Suippes to discover what had become of the enemy's cuirassiers. His motive for doing this was that the patrol sent out the previous evening had not sent in any information.

**5 a.m.**—At 5 o'clock the captain ordered reveille. He personally inspected the horses so as to assure himself that his officers had not exaggerated their report. He was rather afraid of the orders he might receive in the morning, considering, as he did, that the squadron was incapable of accomplishing any serious task until it had had some rest. In the first place, he gave orders that the horses' legs should be thoroughly well rubbed down, and that those who required it should be taken to water. He then set to work to make sure of getting in all the provisions required for the day, in case it were required to remain there. The mayor was therefore sent for, but the result of a conversation with him was not satisfactory. The village was poor and the season unfavourable. There was no want of forage; a little oats of fair quality still remained, but the most rigorous search would not have produced anything with which to make bread. The local baker always got his meal from the mill at Cuperly; he had no reserve stock, and the requisition of the previous day had exhausted his supply. But allowing three hours for searching for and bringing the flour, the time required for kneading, baking and cooling, the bread might still be had before the day was over. The men would have to be content with a little biscuit for their morning meal, if they had not enough bread left from the previous day.

The captain, therefore, decided that the baker should go in a cart under good escort and get a stock of meal at the mill. It would have been easier and quicker to send to requisition at Bussy-le-Château, but the road did not appear so safe.

This important matter being settled, the captain relieved the night outposts without altering the disposition of them for the day. Other matters of detail occupied his attention until 7 a.m.

**7 a.m.**—At this time the Somme-Suippes patrol returned,\* and reported that the enemy's cuirassiers had kept their outposts out all

\*See p. 104 for the corporal's orders, and compare Note p. 97.

night to the south of the village, had withdrawn them about 5 a.m., and had at once marched off. The corporal, in returning, had crossed the officer of the patrol, who was making for the village, and had reported the fact to him; but the officer had nevertheless continued his course.

The captain severely reprimanded the corporal for not having sent any message during the night, and for having allowed the enemy to move off without trying to discover the direction of his retreat. However well a squadron may be trained, similar acts of neglect are always being committed by non-commissioned officers; and it is the leader's duty to reprimand those who may be guilty of them, in order to avoid a repetition of them. The captain, however, was pleased that his lieutenant had perceived the fault which the corporal had committed, since he in part made up for it by continuing to take his patrol to Somme-Suippes.

**8 a.m.**—About 8 o'clock the officer returned. He reported that Somme-Suippes was evacuated, and that, according to the inhabitants, the cuirassiers had taken the road to Vouziers. He had not followed them, because they had such a start; but at the mairie he had seized a quite recent requisition order for 400 rations, which enabled one to estimate the strength of the force, and also betrayed the number of the regiment (13th Cuirassiers).

The captain at once transmitted this news through the connecting posts.

*Contact Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

No. 11.

*To the Commander of the outposts at Poix, for transmission to the General of Division.*

La Cheppe, 5th July, 8.10 a.m.

1°—One of the two regiments of cuirassiers reconnoitred by me yesterday, passed the night at Somme-Suippes and left there this morning. It appeared to move towards Vouziers, and is the 13th Cuirassiers.

2°—Everything is quiet round me. My patrols are scouring the country for information.

A...

*Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons.*

The departure of the cuirassiers had relieved the squadron of a dangerous neighbour, and it was only right to profit by this in order to conform to the latest instructions of the general, which enjoined that information must be obtained.

The instinct of the situation made the captain feel that Suippes ought to be the centre whence to obtain the desired information; and following out this idea it would certainly have been very desirable for the squadron to take position there as its centre of action. But his instructions were very decided on this head; the squadron was not to advance beyond la Cheppe. Still there was no objection to his patrols visiting Suippes. It would be better, too, to have Somme-Tourbe searched, for everything pointed to the probability that the other regiment of cuirassiers had passed the night there, and it was important to know what had become of it. If it, too, had taken the direction

of Vouziers, the different items of information would confirm each other. In any case, the captain would but be acting strictly in accordance with the instructions of the general if he made sure of this. He, therefore, sent for Sub-Lieut. C... and Serjeant Z... and gave them the following orders :

*1°—To Sub-Lieut. C...*

Take an escort of 6 men and a corporal and push on as far as Suippes. The village must have been occupied by the cuirassiers; find out what has become of them. On arrival, go at once to the telegraph office, seize the register of despatches, and bring it back with you. Then question the inhabitants, and ascertain what troops have passed lately and what direction they have taken. Try also to seize the letters at the post office.

*2°—To Serjeant Z...*

Take 3 men with you and push forward to Somme-Tourbe. Find out if a regiment of cuirassiers passed the night there, and in what direction they moved off this morning. Also try to find out if any of the enemy's troops have appeared lately in the neighbourhood, what description of troops they were, and which direction they have taken. Try to seize some letters at the post office, and some papers at the mairie. In short, bring me all the information you can get.

The sub-lieutenant and serjeant were to rejoin the squadron at la Cheppe, but in case the squadron shifted its position and they could not find it, they were to retire to Poix, where they would find some troops of the Division, to whom they were to communicate the information they had obtained.

The non-commissioned officer took with him a rough sketch of the route, and the two parties set out for their respective destinations.

## II.

### State of Affairs at Head Quarters.\*

While the captain is waiting in expectation at la Cheppe, and his reconnoitring parties are carrying out their instructions, it is time we conducted the reader to the head quarters of the cavalry division, so that he may understand the course of events and the changes which had been brought about in the situation, owing to the information gathered by the Contact Squadron and the orders emanating from General Head Quarters.

The head quarters of the Division on the 4th July were at Omey, a village on the right bank of the Marne, half-way between Vitry-le-François and Châlons. On the 5th July the Division was disposed as follows :

Hussar Brigade .....	{ At Somme-Yèvre and Givry-en-Argonne.
Dragoon Brigade .....	
	{ At Moivre, La Frène-sur-Moivre, Coupeville.

\*See General Map.

Cuirassier Brigade .....	{ At Saint-Jean-sur-Moivre, Dampierre-sur-Moivre, Francheville, Pogny.
Artillery (except one battery detached with Hussar Brigade) } .....	{ At la Chaussée-sur-Marne and Coulmiers.
Head Quarters .....	At Omey.
Departments .....	{ At Omey and la Chaussée- sur-Marne.
Train .....	At Aulnay-l'Aître.

The line of outposts of the main body of the Division extended from Saint-Germain-la-Ville by Marson to Poix, that of the Hussars from Dammartin-sur-Yèvre by Epense to la Neuville-aux-Bois; the Hussars had also a small detachment about Herpont to keep up communication with the main body.

On the left bank of the Marne another cavalry division was scouring the country, giving a hand to our division by way of Vitry-la-Ville and Cheppes.

Thus the 1st division covered a front of more than 30 kilometres (19 miles), a disposition as excellent for purposes of discovery as it was utterly faulty for resistance, but one which the dislocation of the enemy's army and the demoralisation of the inhabitants justified for the present.

Behind these cavalry divisions came the masses of the invading armies. The 1st Army marched on Châlons, echeloned between the Meuse and the Marne; the 1st Corps, which was most in advance, had reached Bar-le-Duc; the others were crossing the lines of the Ormain, Ersule, Aire and Saulx. The 2nd Army remained in observation on the Meuse to the north and south of Verdun. The 3rd Army blockaded around Metz the corps of the enemy which had been beaten on the Sarre. General Head-quarters followed the 1st Army, and had not yet advanced beyond Ligny-sur-Ornain.

On the 1st July it was supposed at General Head-quarters that the enemy's army, beaten in the Vosges, had retired on Châlons. It was not known whether his intention was to fight there, or to retire covering Paris. But, on either hypothesis, orders were given to pursue and attack him everywhere where he might halt.

All at once certain vague rumours, certain indications which were as yet but obscure, pointed to a very different eventuality. It was said that the army of Châlons, so far from resigning itself to a defensive rôle, was being reinforced, and meditated throwing itself again towards the Meuse on the right flank of the invading host, doubtless in order to give a hand to the army of Metz, which would, at the same time, make an effort to force the blockade. Some indications even led one to suppose that this manœuvre would be executed at once.

The General Staff was necessarily concerned above all things to unmask the plans of the enemy in sufficient time to thwart them. It

had therefore hastened to communicate its suspicions to the 1st Army, and charged it to strain every nerve to verify them as soon as possible. On this account the 1st Army had pushed forward its cavalry divisions.

The 1st division had received the order to scour the right bank of the Marne as far as Châlons, there to gather information and seek contact with the enemy; and this was the cause of the general having at once detached the squadron of the 1st dragoons and confided to it the mission which is the object of this study.

We have seen in what manner the captain strove to accomplish his task. Of what use his efforts were, what were the consequences of the information he transmitted, and how he was relieved of his task—all this it now remains for us briefly to explain.

### III.

#### Results of the Despatches sent from the Squadron.

We will now show, in the order in which they were sent, what became of the latest despatches addressed by Captain A... to his General of Division.

Despatch No. 5, sent from Francheville at 7 p.m. on the 3rd July, reached divisional head-quarters at Thiéblemont at 1 a.m. on the 4th July, together with the newspapers seized at Marson, numbered 6 and 7 respectively.

Despatch No. 8, sent from l'Epine at 7 a.m. on the 4th July, arrived the same day at la Chaussée at 9.25 a.m.

Despatch No. 9, sent from la Cheppe at 10.50 a.m. on the 4th July, did not reach divisional head-quarters at Omey until 6 p.m. We see that considerable delay occurred in the transmission of this despatch, as the distance to be covered hardly exceeded 30 to 35 kilometres ( $21\frac{1}{4}$  miles).

Lastly, despatch No. 10, sent from la Cheppe on the 4th at 2.30 p.m. never reached head-quarters, nor was it ever known what became of the corporal who carried it. This instance exemplifies the rule which requires that important despatches should always be sent in multiplicate. Fortunately Staff-Captain R... had taken down the gist of it in his note-book. The reader may remember that he left la Cheppe at 3.30 p.m. At 6.30 he arrived at Poix, and after having arranged with the commander of the outposts to carry out the plan agreed upon by him and Captain A..., his first care was to send to the general a report of the events of the day, in which he included the substance of the lost despatch.

Captain R..., whose horse was too knocked up to ride back to Omey in one stage, passed the night at Poix; but his report, sent through the connecting posts of the division, reached head-quarters at Omey at 9 p.m. The news contained therein, when compared with that obtained from other sources of information at the disposal of the general, enabled him to complete his general idea of the situation. There was no longer any doubt in his mind that the enemy's army had broken up the camp at Châlons and was now on the march towards the Aisne and Lower Meuse.

The general of division had then communicated to the general-in-chief all the items of information he had collected, especially those furnished by the 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons, and particularly the two Paris newspapers seized at Marson. He had further taken care to re-establish the line of telegraph in rear of the division. Thus at 1 a.m. on the 5th July, General Head-quarters at Ligny was enabled to receive the following telegram, of which a duplicate was at the same time sent to the 1st Army.

*1st Cavalry Division.*

*Staff.*

No. — .

*To the General in Chief, at Ligny.*

Oaney (on road from Vitry to Châlons) 4th July, 10 p.m.

A reconnoitring squadron (1st Dragoons) has scoured the camp of Châlons and found it abandoned, but showing traces of recent occupation. It has reported a brigade of cuirassiers and one of infantry on the march from the direction of Châlons towards Vouziers.

Yesterday, 3rd July, imposing forces were concentrated on the Suippe, and the Intendance has made heavy requisitions there. An intercepted letter shews that a large number of cart drivers have been requisitioned for the convoys, and that these men expect to march in the direction of Vouziers. Everything indicates a general movement of the enemy in that direction.

Châlons appears to be, at any rate, very weakly occupied, if it is not entirely evacuated.

I await your orders at Oaney. My division holds the line of the Moivre and the sources of the Yèvre. You can address telegrams to me by la Chaussée-sur-Marne, as the line is re-established.

The 2nd Cavalry Division is abreast of me on the left bank of the Marne. Nothing new in its direction.

X...

*General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division.*

**7 a.m.**—At 7 o'clock on the 5th July, General X... received a reply from General Head Quarters by telegraph :

*General Head Quarters.*

*Staff, 1st Section.*

No. — .

*To the General Commanding 1st Cavalry Division at Oaney.*

Ligny, 5th July, 5 a.m.

The combined armies will pursue the enemy on the lower Meuse, making a change of front towards the north. Cover the exposed flank by moving your head quarters to Somme-Yèvre to-night, your division facing north, your reconnoitrrers as far as the Verdun Railway, which you will cut as soon as possible. The 2nd Cavalry Division will temporarily take position in rear of you at Fresne-sur-Moivre. My head quarters remain at Ligny; those of the 1st Army at Bar-le-Duc. The 1st Army will give you orders, but continue to transmit important news direct to me at the same time as to the 1st Army.

....., *General in Chief.*

This telegram inaugurated a fresh phase in the operations of the armies of the east.

General X... at once issued his orders for the march in the direction indicated, and, considering that the mission of Captain A... was fulfilled, and that it would in any case be necessary to relieve his squadron from so fatiguing a duty, he directed his staff to recall him.

**10.30 a.m.**—Thus at 10.30 o'clock a messenger from the connecting post arrived at la Cheppe by the Chaussée Romaine, bringing the following despatch for the 1st Squadron :

*1st Cavalry Division.*

*Staff.*

No. 780.

*To the Captain, 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons, at la Cheppe.*

From Divisional Head Quarters at Oney, 5th July, 7.25 a.m.

The mission of the 1st Squadron, 1st Dragoons, being terminated, the Squadron will rally in the evening at Herpont, 5 kilometres (about 3 miles) west of Dam-martin-sur-Yèvre; it will there find the head quarters of its brigade and receive further orders.

The head quarters of the Division will be from midday till 2 o'clock at la Fresne-sur-Moivre; in the evening at Somme-Yèvres. Despatches can be addressed accordingly if necessary.

By order,

T..., *Chief of Staff.*

On receipt of this order Captain A... only waited for the return of his reconnoitring parties to commence the return march.

He decided that the morning meal should be eaten at la Cheppe. According to the despatch, the movement of the squadron need not be hurried, so long as it reached Herpont in the evening; and that was only a march of some twenty kilometres ( $12\frac{1}{2}$  miles). He therefore determined to let the squadron take things as easily as possible. Still, knowing that he was to report himself to brigade head-quarters at Herpont, he concluded that other troops occupied the village, and that cantonments there would probably be very crowded. Knowing by experience that troops which arrive first always get the best accommodation, he preferred to set out in good time, notwithstanding the heat. "Our work has been more severe than that of others," said he to himself, "and we have certainly deserved the best shelter for to-day, that is, the most thorough rest. If we look out for ourselves a little, we shall certainly be better off."

Accordingly he fixed 2.30 p.m. as the time for marching. If necessary he would leave a non-commissioned officer at the entrance to la Cheppe to point out to those who might come in late where they were to rejoin.

His foresight caused him not to forget the evening meal. He knew that when a detachment has been absent for some days, the corps to which it belongs is very liable not to include it in the indents, and that it can seldom reckon upon getting its rations the day it rejoins, especially when it does not do so till evening. He therefore ordered his squadron to take away from la Cheppe whatever they could get there in the way of bread, meat and oats, and he requisitioned a cart so as to avoid overloading the horses. The baker of la Cheppe had returned at 8 o'clock with flour from the mill at Cuperly, and set to work at once to make bread. The cattle had been slaughtered, and when the portion of meat intended for the morning meal was cooked, the squadron had breakfast.

**Mid-day.**—At mid-day Sub-Lieut. C... returned from Suippes. The information he brought was already partly known, or foreseen. A brigade of infantry had passed the previous day at Suippes, and had set out in the morning on the Vouziers road. All the teams in the country had been requisitioned during the preceding days and had gone in the same direction. Numerous columns had succeeded each other in the village during the last two days. The register of despatches seized by the sub-lieutenant at the telegraph office was full of military despatches, some of which were very important. These the captain sent with a report to the general of division, addressing them through the connecting posts to Fresne-sur-Moivre.

**2 p.m.**—About 2 o'clock the patrol from Somme-Tourbe returned. Serjeant Z... had there learnt that a regiment of cuirassiers had arrived the previous day, and had set out in the morning by the road which follows the valley of the Tourbe towards Laval and Minaucourt; that is, still in the direction of Vouziers, or at any rate of the valley of the Aisne. There was great activity at the railway station, and constant movement of trains both ways on the line from Châlons to Verdun. He had not been able to seize any papers. The reconnoitring party had no doubt been seen coming, as every one appeared to be prepared for it.

At 3 o'clock the bread was still not ready. The captain had deceived himself as to the time necessary to make a batch when the dough has not been raised beforehand. He therefore determined to start, taking only the remainder of the meat on the cart. But he utilized the vacant space by easing the horses of everything that was not absolutely indispensable on their saddles.

**3 p.m.**—At last, all the posts being relieved, the squadron set out, protected by advanced and rearguard, and flankers. The march was executed at the walk only, and they reached Herpont at 6.15 p.m. after an uneventful journey. The brigade head-quarters were already installed in the village, but cantonments for the squadron had been reserved for them. The general communicated to the captain the congratulations which the general of division had directed him to convey to him and to his squadron, and informed him that for some days the latter would accompany head-quarters and be spared as much as circumstances would allow.

It was high time that this should be so, for both men and horses had nearly reached the extreme limit of their powers. But their rest was not of long duration. On the third day the operations took such an active turn, that the squadron had to rejoin its regiment and follow its fortunes in the stirring movements of the campaign of the Meuse, so fatal, alas! to the army of Châlons and the destiny of the vanquished.

## CONCLUSIONS.

### I.

#### The Attitude of the Enemy.

We have now reached the end of our narrative. We have endeavoured to shew on several occasions that the mission of a Contact Squadron, in an enemy's country and without support, is not so easy as people generally affect to consider it.

The difficulties with which it has to contend are of various kinds.

In the first place, there is the nature of the enemy to take into account. In the present study, Captain A... had the best of the game. The enemy had been beaten, demoralised by the disorder of retreat, and discouraged by the consciousness of his numerical inferiority; moreover, he thought much more of protecting himself from the enterprises of a victorious cavalry than of opposing it. The population, too, was taken aback. The precipitate retreat of their defenders and the rapid march of the invading host, struck them with dread and deprived them of all idea of resistance.

We have borrowed our situation from reality, since we have really worked up an episode of the war of 1870. But things will not always be as they were then. Most frequently a reconnoitring squadron will require to exercise the greatest skill in order to manœuvre in the midst of the enemy. Sometimes it will have to glide through the meshes of the exploring veil, sometimes it will have no other resource but to tear its way through it with the sword, if it is determined to know at any price what is passing beyond it. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the difficulties of such a rôle. It must be undertaken, not under the preconceived illusion that everything will be easy, but with an iron will to go on to the very end, and attain our object, cost what it may. That obstacles will rise up on all sides is certain; but this is merely a stronger reason for anticipating them, and then, so far from being astonished at them, we shall only think the better how to avoid or overcome them.

Let us imagine what would have been the result if the army of Châlons had left its cavalry in observation between the sources of the Aisne and the valley of Ornain. It is certain that Captain A... would not have penetrated so easily to the camp of Châlons; at any rate, he would not have succeeded without making wide détours and wasting much time. Perhaps, indeed, he would have entirely failed, and then General X... would have been compelled to engage his whole division in order to force the outposts of the enemy, and the chances are that the information which he might thus have obtained, would have been much more tardy and less complete.

In place of that, thanks to the inactivity of the enemy, nothing occurred to disturb the captain's plans or upset his dispositions. But these were assuredly exceptional circumstances ; instead of expecting them to occur again, we must, on the contrary, anticipate in the next wars more active resistance, more serious difficulties, and even at that price, less decisive success.

The cavalry soldier will not fail to see the force of these considerations, but they should not in the least diminish his confidence. Want of success, even in numerous enterprises, by no means proves that we shall not be successful in the next one. To be taken aback by nothing, relying a good deal on oneself and a little on luck, and always to go forward—such should be the rule of action of the cavalry officer.

## II.

### Map-reading and the Knowledge of Languages.

The reader will have remarked that on several occasions Captain A... and his subordinates extricated themselves from difficulties either through studying their map or questioning the inhabitants. These are two resources of the highest value, but we cannot always avail ourselves of them.

Thus it is impossible, at the commencement of a campaign, to distribute so many maps that each officer will be sure to have the very one he requires at any moment. We must, therefore, be satisfied to do without them sometimes. But we should not on that account neglect to do our best to procure them. To this end, an officer will make it a point to search the mairies, school-rooms, road-surveyors' offices, and even private houses. He will secure all the maps of the country which he may find on the premises, and even if he has already got one he will not neglect this precaution, for it often happens that these maps are more complete, more recent, and show more detail, than those which he may have received from the staff.

On this head, let us observe how advantageous it is that good instruction in map-reading should be given to non-commissioned officers during time of peace. In an unknown country, what a source of satisfaction it would be to the captain if his non-commissioned officers knew enough of map-reading to guide themselves by a sketch.

Let us hear no more about its being useless to have classes for non-commissioned officers, that it takes them away from their duties, and similar nonsense. Certainly it would be absurd to cram their heads with the history of the Merovingian Kings or the Punic wars ; but it would be most unpardonable neglect to omit teaching them how to read a plain road map or even a contoured one. As to the possibility of arriving at real results in this branch of instruction, the only things opposed to it are the apathy of instructors and erroneous methods of teaching. If we attempt to teach any so-called scientific system of topography, bristling with calculations and descriptions of instruments, we shall gain nothing. But if we wisely confine our-

selves to practical ideas and the teaching of plain topographic drawing we shall easily succeed ; for it is much easier to learn to read drawing than writing, and all non-commissioned officers have learnt to read.

As to a knowledge of languages, it is unfortunately more difficult to obtain good results here. It is no use thinking of instructing non-commissioned officers in them. Everything is wanting for that ; time, will, and even teachers. In our army but few officers speak a foreign language, which is much to be regretted, especially as regards cavalry. But it is much easier to point out the evil than to supply a remedy for it. We have too long neglected the study of living languages, and cannot make real progress until this question is seriously entertained in families and schools. Children learn languages easily ; later on, when arrived at manhood, their aptitude is not the same, for both tongue and ear refuse to adapt themselves to sounds very different from those which are already familiar to them.

What a source of inferiority this is for our cavalry, as compared with that of other nations ! How should we set to work in making a requisition in German ? Make oneself understood in another way, some will say. Very good ; but can we make ourselves so well understood ? And how are we to question prisoners and country people ? What advantage could be derived from papers which might fall into our hands ?

In our illustration, if Captain A... had not understood French, would he have appreciated all the importance of the telegrams he seized, of the newspapers he found at Marson, of the letter from the farmer at Saint-Hilaire, which he intercepted at la Cheppe ? Would he have derived any advantage from the replies of inhabitants or prisoners ? Can any one picture to himself, as a practical solution of the question, a leader of reconnoiters flanked by an interpreter on horseback ? What sources of information would be lost ! What vitally important indications perhaps altogether undetected !

Let us make the humiliating confession, that we are behind other nations in this respect. For some years past a happy awakening has been taking place in France ; let us try to participate in this, but principally may we hope that it will profit those who come after us.

### III.

#### The Transmission of Despatches.

Notwithstanding all that we have just said, it is not in the resistance of the enemy, nor in the want of maps, nor in ignorance of the language of the country that the chief difficulties are to be found.

Somehow or other, and in spite of all obstacles, a bold officer will generally manage to reach the ground assigned to him to explore. With activity and address he will even succeed in gaining important, if not decisive, information. We grant all this. But in our opinion the greatest and chief difficulty, for the success of the mission mainly depends upon it, is the transmission of his despatches. We lay great

stress on this point, because of all the schemes for organising the service of exploration, those especially which recommend pushing reconnoitring squadrons far in advance seem to have been but little concerned hitherto with the solution of this problem.

It is not simply necessary to gain information ; it must be transmitted. In a friendly country, or when the reconnoiters are linked to the main body by connecting posts, the thing appears easy enough ; but in the enemy's country, if the reconnoitring bodies have become completely detached from the Division, the difficulty begins as soon as some 15 or 20 kilometres (10 or 13 miles) have been attained, and it increases with the distance.

To begin with, let us lay down the principle that it is useless in such a case to think of organising relay posts for transmitting correspondence. The thing is physically impossible, for the simple reason that neither the main body of the division nor the detached squadron is in a position to provide them. Indeed, in order to organise these connecting posts three conditions are necessary. First of all, the point from which the chain of relays is to start and that to which it is to extend must be known; secondly, there must be the possibility of relieving them and rallying them on their corps; thirdly, they must not be exposed to capture by the enemy.

Now, if the division is in the marching stage of operations and in the enemy's country, none of these three conditions will be fulfilled. Both the division and the squadron are liable to move; and the position of their objective, the enemy, is equally unstable. Their routes, being dependent on the movement of the enemy (that is, on the unknown), are essentially variable, irregular, impossible to foresee from one day to another. One cannot therefore know beforehand either where the chain will commence (the main body of the division), or the point to which it is to lead (the reconnoitring squadron). It would be just as possible to draw a geometrical line between two unknown points *x* and *y*.

But supposing the problem to have been solved by chance ; that is, suppose that the chain has been extended and the posts fixed. This is all very well for to-day, but what about to-morrow ? To-morrow the division will shift its position, and the squadron too. How, then, is the connection to be re-established ?

Again, whether your posts are furnished by the main body of the detaching force, or by the detachment itself, how will you relieve them ? When you leave them, where will you tell them to rejoin, not knowing yourself where you are going ? Of course, we are here supposing a distance of 30 or 40 kilometres (say 18 or 25 miles), which requires at least 4 or 5 hours for an order to traverse the whole length of the chain. We are also supposing that the division does not know where the enemy is : it is seeking and groping about for it ; its march therefore is uncertain, being guided solely by the ever-varying reports of the patrols. Under these conditions, we assert that connecting posts will never be relieved with precision. They will be forgotten and go astray, and their despatches with them.

We therefore inevitably arrive at the conclusion that the establishment of a chain of relays 10 leagues long is impossible in practice in an enemy's country. In rear of the cavalry division, to connect it with the corps d'armée, it will perhaps be feasible to organise one; but in front of it, in the direction of the contact squadron, it is useless to think of it.

The preceding discussion will appear superfluous to some readers; but the theory of connecting posts still counts so many partisans, that its absurdity deserves to be exposed.

We would add that we have but little confidence in the trustworthiness of this mode of proceeding. In our opinion a despatch which is confided to the responsibility of a single person is much safer than it would be if it circulated from hand to hand, under the anonymous responsibility of a chain of relay posts.

The system of connecting posts as applied to the case in point being impracticable, and even dangerous, let us search for something else. Some authors recommend the employment of the telegraph. This certainly appears tempting, but is unfortunately open to many objections. In the first place, officers must know how to manipulate the instruments, which is but very rarely the case in our army. This is another branch of military education which is still too much neglected, and to which it is expedient to draw the attention of the authorities. Strictly speaking, a mounted telegraphist would be attached to the party. But one is apt to forget that most frequently a reconnoitring officer will be ordered to cut the telegraph, as happened in the preceding study.

Moreover, in an enemy's country, the telegraph is an unfaithful messenger; despatches are liable to be intercepted, mutilated, and altered. Still it is an auxiliary resource which must not be rejected in principle, but care must be taken that it is only used under fitting circumstances. When employed, the staff must let it be known to what telegraph station the division is attached, and to it the reconnoitring officer will send his despatches.

But, owing to the uncertainty of the telegraph, it is essential that a reconnoitring officer should never be satisfied with a telegram for the transmission of important news. He ought always to send a duplicate of such a despatch by a messenger. It would also be prudent to send certain despatches in cypher, for which purpose the plan indicated by General de Brack would be found useful. It is the most convenient and the most rapid cypher, and perhaps the only one which is illegible by anyone who does not possess the key.\*

Leaving exceptional modes of communication out of consideration, there remains but one normal mode of ensuring the transmission of despatches, viz., to send messengers as Captain A... did. It may be asked whether it is better to send them on horseback or in carriages. Certainly, when the distance is not too great and the horses are not

\*See his "Light Cavalry Outposts" (English Translation) p. 84, and Lord Wolseley's Soldier's Pocket-Book, 4th Ed., p. 472.—Tr.

too much fatigued, the former method is to be preferred; it entails fewer complications, a man on horseback is freer in his movements, and he can pass where a carriage would be stopped. But if the horses have already covered 12 or 15 leagues, and a despatch has to be sent 30 or 40 kilometres (18 or 25 miles) in the evening, there is great fear that it may not reach its destination. Some horses are able to make such a journey, but not all. This opinion will not sound strange to those who consider the average condition of a troop horse, the enormous weight it carries, and the irregular nourishment it receives.

But other considerations come into play. In an enemy's country a solitary horseman is continually exposed to being shot. His uniform and his isolation point him out to the vengeance of the inhabitants. It will, therefore, often be advantageous to disguise the bearers of despatches. But a man on horseback, even if disguised, will always arouse suspicion.

For these reasons then, it will often be preferable to send messengers on requisitioned carriages. The German staff officers travelled in this way with their horses tied to the back of the carriage. This method combines many advantages, but we fear that it could not be easily adopted with our horses, as many of them would pull backwards and cause great embarrassment. The plan must be tried before pronouncing a final opinion on it. Meanwhile, it appears to us to be simpler to leave with the squadron the horse of the man who is taking the despatch. It would then be led, and in case of need could temporarily replace the mount of another man, which might have been knocked up.

#### IV.

#### <sup>A</sup> **The Role of Staff Officers.**

If the reader will refer back to the incident of our narrative which is marked by the arrival of Staff-Captain R..., he will find matter for an observation which is not without interest. Whenever an officer, of the staff or otherwise, meets an officer engaged in reconnoitring duty, he should not forget to emulate the foresight of Captain R... ; that is, he ought to get all the information he can from the scouting officer; this he should take down in his pocket book, being careful to enter each item in the order of its occurrence; and on returning to his corps he should lose no time in communicating it to the general, either directly or through the usual channel.

In short, he should remember that every despatch does not arrive at its destination. Eight times out of ten the information he furnishes will be already known, but this should not deter him from repeating it; some day, perhaps, his report will supply an important omission, and so render an inestimable service to his superiors.

Thus we know that despatch No. 10, sent from la Cheppe by Captain A... on the 4th July, was lost *en route*. Consequently, if Captain R... had neglected the precaution just mentioned, the General of Division would not have received two items of information which

may be considered as almost decisive, viz.: 1° That the camp of Châlons was abandoned; 2° that considerable fractions of the enemy's forces were on the Suippes, marching towards the north-east.

The mission of the staff-captain to the Contact Squadron was really a necessity of the situation. And observe that it was no easy matter to find in the open country a squadron so entirely detached, so as to convey to it the general's instructions. To do this, it was necessary to know its last position, its preceding positions, and the probable direction which events might have compelled it to take since it left the point from which its last despatch was dated. An officer of the staff alone could be in a position to know all the required data.

Moreover, in the then state of affairs, from the moment that contact had been established, and the latest items of information seemed to mark the initial point of a fresh system of operations, it became indispensable to re-establish between the Division and the detached squadron a closer connection and more thorough reciprocity of communications than could have been obtained by the mere exchange of despatches. Only a staff officer, who was initiated in the general views of head quarters, could be in a position by betaking himself to the fountain head of information, to control the important communications which might be made by the squadron, to fill up gaps and correct misconceptions, to indicate points which still required to be cleared up by further research, and if necessary to modify the order for retirement, which he was charged to convey to Captain A..., according to the turn things might take after he had consulted with him and had formed an opinion of the situation on the ground and with his own eyes.

Looked at from this point of view, the functions of the staff officer take much wider proportions. But we also see what a serious step his intervention is, and how important it is that he should be prepared by a thorough training in his peculiar duties to form a sound judgment on any given situation, to enter into the views of those in command, to take the initiative and boldly act on his own responsibility.

## V.

### The Strength of a Reconnoitring Detachment.

There is still a question intimately connected with our subject, viz.: What should be the strength of a reconnoitring party to enable it to accomplish an enterprise such as that undertaken by Captain A...? We should reply that a squadron thoroughly satisfies the requirements of the case—that a body of that strength is at once necessary and sufficient.

Thus we have seen that the captain was several times obliged to detach one or two pelotons for purposes of discovery on his flanks, while he himself took up a position secured by temporary outposts, and further pushed out patrols in front of him. This was notably the case when the squadron arrived at la Cheppe: taking all the detach-

ments into account, the captain had at that time hardly more than 80 men with him. This certainly was not too many to be ready for an unlooked-for emergency; and on several occasions we have seen him reduced to similar numbers. We have only to turn back to the various incidents of the Blesme railway station, Vitry-le-François, &c., to be convinced that a body of less strength would not have been equal to the situation, and especially that it would have lost much time in its inquiries through not being able to cover sufficient ground at a time.

The captain sent in eleven despatches during the four days that his mission lasted. Many of these were sent in duplicate, and we have already remarked that this ought always to have been done. The escorting of prisoners took away three or four men, and thus the squadron was weakened by some 24 or 25 men merely for the purpose of ensuring the transmission of information. If we add to this the lame horses, sick men, and losses which might have resulted from an eventual encounter with the enemy, we shall probably conclude that a party inferior in strength to a squadron would not have been sufficient.

In short, the squadron is a very complete unit in the hand of its leader. Its tactical and administrative organisation, its numbers, equally suitable for overcoming slight resistance and for avoiding serious attacks, give it great independence. It is indeed the unit naturally designed for such a mission as that which we have studied; a mission certainly difficult, but highly seductive and worthy of the noblest ambition of the cavalry officer.



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Squadron.

Author Biensan, R. De.

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